> The project thus reveals a cartography of violence spanning from the street corner level to the entire state of Guerrero. It describes an act of violence that is no longer a singular event but a prolonged act, which persists to this day in the continued absence of the 43 students.
>
> It also seeks to demonstrate the way in which collective civil society initiatives, undertaking independent investigations using innovative analytical tools, could help investigate complex crimes and confront criminal impunity and the failures of Mexican law enforcement.
>
> In particular, it reaffirms our commitment to heal the open wound of the Ayotzinapa case and to work until the truth of the night is clarified, and the students' whereabouts are known. (https://www.forensic-architecture.org)

Unlike other investigations that Forensic Architecture conducted, the Ayotzinapa project did not present new evidence. Among the main sources used were the two reports published by the GIEI and the book *Una historia oral de la infamia: Los ataques a los normalistas de Ayotzinapa* (2016) by John Gibler, a book composed entirely of interviews conducted with survivors in the months following the disappearance. Rather than uncovering new evidence, Forensic Architecture instead honed in this project the practice of collating and presenting data in an accessible manner.

In addition to the platform, the project was exhibited as part of Forensic Architecture: Towards an Investigative Aesthetic from 9 September 2017 until 7 January 2018 at the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC) in Mexico City.

Taking into account that this platform utilizes the reports published by the GIEI as one of its main sources, it is possible to establish both a continuation as well as significant differences. Both are investigations whose main goal is to uncover the truth. Forensic Architecture developed this platform not as a new investigation to add more or better evidence to a trial but as a way to communicate what happened that night to a global audience. Instead of using the established format of a "report," a principal way in which NGOs perform the task of "information politics" (Keck and Sikkink 1998), they developed an aesthetic object—the platform—that was exhibited in museums. Unlike the report, the interactive character of the platform engages the visitor, who also becomes a detective in a certain sense who has to discover the facts while navigating the website. The exhibition at the MUAC also encompassed immersive experiences, such as entering a dark room that reproduces the acoustic experience of a prison in Saydnaya.

"We share our work with the public via leading research and cultural institutes. Our main beneficiaries are always the victims of human rights violations, and communities in conflict zones or otherwise subject to state failure or violence," they affirm. Here, "public" appeals to a global civil soci-

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ety capable of being interpellated by the event and multiplying the efforts to achieve justice.

Ayotzinapa: Visual Action

Ayotzinapa: Visual Action was an initiative launched by the Argentine photographer Marcelo Brodsky, together with the Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña Tlachinollan in November 2014. For this action, Brodsky invited people from all over the world to photograph themselves in groups with the slogan that has become a symbol for the search of the disappeared: "Vivos se los llevaron, vivos los queremos" (They took them alive, we want them alive). The initiative was aimed to create a transnational campaign that could help provide legitimacy to the cause through the expression of solidarity with the local activists. The relevance of Ayotzinapa: Visual Action is that, beyond constituting an enactment of two modes of practices of the work of global justice—bearing witness and solidarity—it draws upon transnational memories on disappearance, particularly from Argentina, to reframe the meaning of the event.

Due to a strong response to the initiative, Visual Action became an exhibition composed of hundreds of photos from all over the world. While the primary space of exhibition was the web, I analyze here a book publication that gathers a selection of the pictures from the action, as well as a compilation of other photos, short texts, and essays related to the case. The first part of the book—the Action—is composed of fifty-two photos. All of them follow a similar pattern with slight variations. The pictures depict an assemblage of people standing or sitting in rows, facing the camera directly.

The participants are holding up banners. These are either letters placed together to show the complete message or single banners in which the manifestation chant is fully included. Along with the most important slogan, "They took them alive, we want them alive," one can find "Justice for Ayotzinapa," "We are all Ayotzinapa," "No podemos ni queremos olvidar," "We can't and don't want to forget," mostly in Spanish. The settings also vary: some are taken outdoors, in scenarios that can be easily recognizable, such as Nueva Delhi in India or La Boca in Buenos Aires, while others are framed in spaces such as the European Center for Constitutional Rights in Berlin or the University of New Brunswick in Canada.

The photos perform a transnational community of belonging composed by anonymous individuals that can nevertheless unite in a new transnational space created by the photos themselves. The more remote the place depicted, the stronger the idea that Ayotzinapa is a cause with such an importance that it received the attention of communities far away, for example from Bangladesh.

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Despite their differences, the photos are identical in the message that each and all of the people convey and the solidarity with the cause of Ayotzinapa, which is inscribed in the slogans, the photos of the disappeared students, or in the use of the term "Ayotzinapa" itself. But *solidarity*—even if it is the most conventional meaning and therefore the most explicit—is neither the exclusive nor the main meaning that these carefully staged photos aim to transmit. Read as a whole, the initiative aims to contest the Mexican structures of impunity by framing the disappearances of the students of Ayotzinapa as an "enforced disappearance," and thus as a human rights violation perpetrated by the state.

To do so, the initiative operates by reframing the issue. Keck and Sikkink stress that building cognitive frames is an essential component of networks' political strategies. If the new framework succeeds, it will influence broader public understanding, which is called *frame resonance* (Keck and Sikkink 2011: 28–29).

For reframing the issue, the exhibition removes the disappearance of the forty-three students from the frame of the War on Drugs—where the boundaries between victims and perpetrators are blurred and the responsibility of the state as perpetrator is not clear—and inscribes it in the long history of enforced disappearances experienced by Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, linking it particularly with Argentina. It does so by mobilizing the repertoire of the Argentine visual legacy and applying it in order to give meaning to the event in Mexico. Visual Action thus closely links both contexts—Argentina and Mexico—so that they become, in certain sense, identical.

The first photo we see in Visual Action is not one of the group pictures showing transnational solidarity with Ayotzinapa but the picture *Buena Memoria* (Good Memory), a well-known work of Marcelo Brodsky. Brodsky, who launched the initiative, is an Argentine visual artist known for his exhibitions and essays on memory. These include works such as *Nexus*, *Tree Time*, *Visual Correspondences*, or *1968: The Fire of Ideas*.

Buena Memoria is a visual essay that deals with the collective memory of the years under the Argentine dictatorship. It consists of a class picture of 1967 of the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires, the artist's own class picture. In their essay on the work, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer describe it as follows:

> The depicted children are lined up in four rows facing forward and smiling; some are looking off to the side . . .
>
> In the installation, the picture is intact but blown up to huge proportions (Brodsky labels it a "gigantograph"). But each of the children's bodies is inscribed with a brief text written on the photo that connects the past to the present, some faces are circled and others are circled and crossed out. The text is simple, abbreviated: "Silvia is very tall as always. She is a physical therapist;"

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Figure 2.1. *La Clase*. © Marcelo Brodsky, 1996.

> "Carlos is a graphic designer;" "Claudio was killed fighting the military in December 1975."
>
> In "Buena Memoria" the violent mark of erasure on the skin-like surface of the photographic print recalls the violence of selecting individuals out of the social body with the intention of annihilating them and their memory. The lines etched into the surface of the print transmit that violence, puncturing us as viewers. (Hirsch and Spitzer 2014: 270)

The second photograph we see in Visual Action is also a class picture of the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires. Instead of being a testimony of the past, this photo features the present. We see a class picture of 2014, in which young students of the Buenos Aires school are facing the camera holding up individual signs that together form the slogan "They took them alive, we want them alive/ Ayotzinapa," along with flags of Argentina and Mexico. The image serves as a bridge between past and present, as well as between the two countries. These students are aware of the fate of the disappeared students of the Colegio Nacional—the students recorded in the photo of 1967 were once sitting in that same classroom, playing in the same corridors—and it is precisely out of this memory of state terrorism, violence, and loss that they act in solidarity with the students suffering the same fate in the pres-

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ent—those of Ayotzinapa. Almost everyone looks solemn, serious, largely hopeless. Although appropriate for the occasion, this somber look contrasts with the expected cheerfulness typical of youth. In this regard, the prevailing atmosphere of the photo of *Buena Memoria* from 1967 diverges remarkably from that of 2014. The dissonance between the grief and sorrow of the facial expressions and the qualities of youth exposes the vulnerability of the group. They are young, they have a life to enjoy, they are innocent, but life reveals itself to be precarious, as it can be suddenly snatched away by the state. The viewer is confronted with the imminence of a violence that the students of the Colegio Nacional could, but fortunately did not, suffer. Moreover, what they testify to is the very absence of those lives that have been taken. In demanding the reappearance of the missing students from Ayotzinapa, they represent the image that is not included in the series, the photograph of the students alive. An impossible object—the disappeared picture, the picture of the disappeared—becomes the *punctum* of the project, an archival document of the erasure by violence. The exhibition thus conflates two temporalities: the meaning it aims to transmit is that what happened to the students of the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires in 1967 has happened again in Mexico, but with more cruelty. While in the initial photo two faces have been crossed out, in the missing picture we would see forty-three faces erased.

Figure 2.2. *Vivos*. © Marcelo Brodsky, Colegio Nacional de Bs. As., 2014.

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Conclusion

The initiatives analyzed, though merely brief examples of the multiple ways in which global civil society became involved in the Ayotzinapa case, show the convergence of different strategies, as well as the common values underpinning the work of global justice. Did these initiatives work? Did they help to bring about a significant change? The answer depends on how we measure their impact. On the one hand, Ayotzinapa definitively opened up the debate on enforced disappearance in the country. Highlighting that Ayotzinapa was not an isolated case but an example of the complex situation of disappearances in the framework of the War on Drugs helped to bring visibility and meaning to the phenomenon. Groups of relatives of disappeared that existed from the period of the Dirty War and newly formed groups of relatives from the War on Drugs united in a new umbrella group called Movimiento por Nuestros Desaparecidos in order to struggle against disappearance in the political, social, and legislative dimensions. The Movimiento demanded a specific legal framework to address disappearances, and a new law was in fact approved in 2017. The Ley General en Materia de Desaparición Forzada de Personas, Desaparición Cometida por Particulares y del Sistema Nacional de Búsqueda de Personas adapts the international framework on enforced disappearance to the particularities of the Mexican context.

Even though some of these collectives and organizations existed before, Ayotzinapa helped them to articulate their demands in the framework of a unified a movement, which strengthened them. Many publications, documentaries, and films that discuss the history of disappearances tell the story of the current situation of violence in the country and recover a memory of human rights violations. From this perspective, the work of a transnational advocacy network that amplified the phenomenon not only made it visible and provided it with meaning but also helped to achieve concrete outcomes, such as the new law and measures to fight against enforced disappearance in the complex Mexican scenario.

Nevertheless, a more skeptical perspective is also possible. After all the activism that took—and still takes—place around Ayotzinapa, the case remains unsolved, and the whereabouts of the students have not been determined. Justice has not been achieved. At a general level, violence in Mexico has not decreased since 2014. The last years have registered the highest numbers of dead and disappeared people since 2006. For many activists who appeared hopeful about the possibility of change, Ayotzinapa meant a disillusion (Velez 2017).

Therefore, a categorical answer to the question "Does transnational civil society bring about change in struggling against human rights violations?" is not possible. If we measure the results in terms of radical change, the answer

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is probably no. But, if we consider, as Kurasawa or Sikkink suggest, that the results to be expected are always incomplete, contingent, and limited, and that the work of global justice has a Sisyphean character with no moment of transcendence, the answer changes to a more optimistic position. The Ayotzinapa case shows that even if partial or incomplete, the transnational work of memory has provided a frame and established new resources to continue the struggle.

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