



TO SEE YOU AGAIN (VOLVERTE A VER)



STUDY GUIDE

www.epfmedia.com

To See You Again

Over a decade ago, the Mexican government declared a war against organized crime, which ended up targeting civilians. An estimated 360,000 people have died since 2006. While searching for their disappeared family members, a group of mothers discovered mass graves in the small towns of Jojutla and Tetelcingo, in the state of Morelos. It became evident that the Mexican authorities were complicit in many of these disappearances. Lina, Angy and Edith and other family members of disappeared loved ones participated in the exhumation of more than 200 bodies. The documentary accompanies the women as they train in forensic science and dig up the bodies of the disappeared. Their investigation reveals a chilling reality, Mexican authorities were involved in the disappearances and surreptitiously buried the bodies in mass graves. This powerful documentary profiles the solidarity, courage and tenacity of these women.

About Morelos

Morelos is a state in central Mexico. It has a population of almost 2 million people, and its capital city is Cuernavaca. Morelos is the second smallest state in Mexico. It is landlocked and is bordered by the Federal District, and the states of México, Puebla, and Guerrero. Jojutla and Tetelcingo are both towns located in Morelos. Tetelcingo is located east of Cuernavaca, while Jojutla is to the south.

The website gob.mx provides a wide variety of information about Mexico and its government, including statistics related to the level of confidence that the people of Morelos have in their government and police. These statistics reveal that more people are likely to feel distrustful of public leaders and officials than to have a high level of confidence in them. The site states, “In 2023, 3.98% of the population of Morelos claimed to have a lot of confidence in the state police, while a 16.4% indicated they have a lot of distrust.” It continues, “Similarly, a 8.24% of the population assured that they had a lot of trust in the Public Ministry and State Prosecutors, a 10.9% in the Judges and a 33% in the Federal Police, while a 18.8%, a 19.3% and a 5.71% claimed to have a lot of distrust in them, respectively.”¹

Violence and Disappearances in Mexico

Much of Mexico experiences drug-related violence, including kidnapping and murders, and Morelos is one of the most affected states. For more than a decade, the Mexican government has been engaged in a “war on drugs” against drug cartels and organized crime. However, this war has been largely ineffective, and it has also resulted in a high level of violence against civilians. Civilians in Morelo and many other parts of Mexico are regularly targeted with violence, and since the 1960s civilian disappearances have become common. While there is evidence that many of these disappearances are the result of organized crime, there is also evidence that some are committed by municipal, state, and federal police.

¹ <https://www.economia.gob.mx/datamexico/en/profile/geo/morelos-mo>

Further, there is evidence that some government officials in Mexico are “disappearing the disappeared” after these people have been killed. It has been discovered that officials have disappeared thousands of bodies into mass graves, without identifying them or following established protocols. There appear to be numerous reasons for this including negligence, omission, laziness, or complicity. Another problem is that in some places, the sheer magnitude of unidentified bodies is overwhelming authorities.

Finding the Disappeared

In recent years, as a result of the lack of government action, an increasing number of citizens and nongovernmental organizations have been involved in finding and identifying the remains of the disappeared. University professor Vivette García Deister has researched the situation and says, “What we see in these [last] 10 years is that these collective organizations, civilian organizations, have become forensic experts themselves . . . doing the work nobody else is willing to do or sees a need to do.” She says, “I also know that there are civil servants and authorities who are willing to do the work, but their capacities are limited and the overflow and backlog of bodies is unmanageable.”²

Finding and identifying the disappeared involves exhumation, which is the process of removing human remains from where they are buried in the ground. Exhumation can be done for a number of different reasons, including for criminal investigation or simply to bury remains in a different place. In most cases, there are strict rules dictating how an exhumation should be carried out, and the process is typically overseen by officials who ensure that it is performed in accordance with regulations.

A Forensic Crisis

Efforts to find and identify the disappeared have revealed the existence of what is being referred to as a forensic crisis in Mexico. In many cases, the country’s forensic system is inadequate to handle, process, preserve, and distribute the information that will allow families to identify all individuals. Investigation has also revealed that for years, some officials have been ignoring the rights of the deceased, by sending them to mass graves without exhausting all options for identification.

The Movimiento por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México (MNDM) [Movement for our Disappeared in Mexico] is a movement made up of human rights organizations and individuals with disappeared family members. In 2021, this movement released a report called, “The Forensic Crisis in Mexico: More than 52,000 Unidentified Deceased Persons,” that examines problems with the current forensic system. As one news article explains, “The movement argues that the leading cause of the current forensic problem is the rise in violence and human rights violations caused by the war on drugs and the militarized approach taken by the Mexican government to combat it. They expose several problems with the current forensic system, including the lack of experts specialized in

² <https://mexiconewsdaily.com/news/forensic-initiative-identify-mexicos-disappeared/#:~:text=As%20of%20May%2C%20the%20number,to%20change%20her%20academic%20trajectory.>

forensic identification and the lack of adequate training of many scientists assigned to forensic identification. Another issue is the low budgets allocated to forensic institutions and problems with the coordination of databases.”³

According to the report, tens of thousands of people have been buried improperly. The authors state:

“There is a backlog of more than 52,000 dead people without identification. The majority of these people (60%) lies in mass graves (fosas comunes) in public cemeteries. These mass graves are notorious for poor records and the likely misplacing of bodies. Unidentified dead people also lie in forensic facilities (7%), universities (5%) or common graves within forensic facilities (centros de resguardo forense, 1%). The authorities have been unable or unwilling to inform the whereabouts of 22% of the deceased individuals without identification.”

The authors explain that there are multiple reasons for the country’s forensic crisis. The report says, “First, there are causes external to the forensic services: the rise of violence in the last 15 years, in particular enforced disappearances and abductions, homicides and concealment of dead people in clandestine mass graves. The crisis of violence has generated an unprecedented burden of workload for the forensic services nationwide. In addition, it explains, “There are causes within the forensic services: insufficient staff, inadequate training, little interdisciplinary work, low salaries and temporary contracts. Forensic services have deficient protocols, they lack supervision and quality control systems, their databases are underused and scarcely interconnected and there are insufficient supplies and equipment in their labs.”⁴

Working for Change

According to the filmmakers, efforts to uncover the truth about the disappeared in Mexico have had significant impacts. They report that prior to 2021, there was no data on the number of mass graves belonging to the states, but as a result of the efforts of families, it is now known that nationally, authorities reported 7,611 active mass graves, while 10,182 were no longer in operation, totaling 17,793 government-owned graves. The filmmakers also explain that by the end of 2021, the Extraordinary Forensic Identification Mechanism was established, which is a public policy built by families of missing persons. The goal of this policy is to identify the over 52,000 bodies classified as unknown in various ordinary forensic services across the country.

In addition, they explain that efforts to find and identify the disappeared can help us understand the crisis in a different way. They explain,

Missing persons and their families often face criminalization and stigma; society, influenced by government messages and some media, assumes that if they disappeared, it’s because “they were involved in something,” “were on the wrong path,” or “brought it upon themselves.” In the case of women, it's often said they "ran away with their boyfriend."

³ <https://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/forensic-crisis-mexico>

⁴ <https://www.identificacionhumana.mx/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/MNDM-Mexicos-Forensic-Crisis-25-Aug-21.pdf>

This documentary opens our eyes to a different reality. Those who disappear are daughters, sons, wives, husbands, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, nieces, belonging to a family and community actively searching for them. Their families have the right to truth and justice and demand to locate their missing loved ones.

They demand to know how the decisions of various public officials lead to hundreds of bodies disappearing in graves, while these officials remain unpunished.

Impact Campaign

See You Again is part of an advocacy initiative that has the following objectives:

- Accompany the collectives "Regresando A Casa" and "Familias Resilientes de Morelos," the protagonists of the documentary, and relatives of missing persons in search efforts.
- Raise awareness about the forensic crisis in Mexico and the irregular use of mass graves by the state.
- Advocate for the case of irregular mass graves in Jojutla and Tetelcingo, Morelos, so that the missing persons can return home.
- The demands of the campaign are to:
 - Identify and bring home the individuals found in the graves in Morelos.
 - Reopen the Jojutla grave to recover those still buried there.
 - Know who is buried in mass graves across the country.

Additional Resources

Documentaries

- "Absences" by Tatiana Huezo
- "Black Suns" by Julien Elie
- "Eternity Didn't Succumb" by Daniela Rea Gómez
- "I Named You in Silence" by José María Espinosa
- "Nostalgia for the Light" by Patricio Guzmán
- "Open the Earth" by Alejandro Zuno
- "Portraits of a Search" by Alicia Calderón
- "Tempest" by Tatiana Huezo

Books

- Azam Ahmed, *Fear Is Just a Word: A Missing Daughter, a Violent Cartel, and a Mother's Quest for Vengeance*. New York: Random House, 2023.
- Carol A. Ireland, Michael Lewis, Anthony C. Lopez and Jane L. Ireland, eds. *The Handbook of Collective Violence: Current Developments and Understanding*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020.
- Jonathan D. Rosen and Roberto Zepeda, *Organized Crime, Drug Trafficking, and Violence in Mexico: The Transition from Felipe Calderón to Enrique Peña Nieto*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016.
- Clare Ribando Seelke and Rachel L. Martin, *Human Rights Challenges in Mexico: Addressing Enforced Disappearances*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2020.
- Lydiette Carrión, *La fosa de Agua*
- Federico Mastrogiovanni, *Ni vivos ni muertos*
- CMDPDH e IBERO CDMX, *Violencia y terror hallazgos sobre fosa clandestinas en México*
- Marcela Turati, *El País de las dos mil fosas*
- Tetelcingo, *Informe: Fosas clandestinas*
- Centro Prodh, *Interpretaciones preliminares*

Online Sources

- Congressional Research Service, “Mexico: Addressing Missing and Disappeared Persons,” July 25, 2022.
<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11669/4>
- Council on Foreign Relations, “Mexico’s Long War: Drugs, Crime, and the Cartels,” September 7, 2022.
<https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/mexicos-long-war-drugs-crime-and-cartels>
- Efraín Tzuc and Marcela Turati , “A Nation Overwhelmed by Its Dead,” Fifth Element Lab, September 22, 2020.
<https://quintoelab.org/project/mexico-nation-overwhelmed-by-its-dead>
- Movimiento por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México, “Mexico’s Forensic Crisis: More than 52,000 Unidentified Dead Persons,” 2021.
<https://movndmx.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Informe-La-Crisis-Forense-en-Me%CC%81xico.pdf>

Groups and Websites

- Civic Data. <https://datacivica.org/>
- Fifth Element Lab. <https://quintoelab.org/>
- Social and Forensic Anthropology Research Group. <https://www.giasf.org/>
- Where the Disappeared Go? <https://adondevanlosdesaparecidos.org/>

Collectives

- Familias Resilientes Morelos. www.facebook.com/Familias-ResilientesMorelos-104271494702778
- Movement for our Missing in Mexico. www.facebook.com/movNDmx
- National Search Brigade. www.facebook.com/brigadadebusqueda
- Regresando a Casa Morelos. www.facebook.com/regresandoacasamorelos

Contact

For inquiries, please contact:

EPF Media

(888) 570-5400; (323) 301-3663

info@epfmedia.com

Copyright. The Study Guide is owned by EPF Media Group, LLC. You may use the Study Guide solely for personal or educational, non-commercial use, and you may download or print any portion of the Study Guide solely for personal or educational, non-commercial use, provided you do not remove the copyright or other notice from such Content. No other use is permitted without prior written permission of EPF Media Group, LLC.