

Hope for Mexico

Mexico City, May 2015. In 2008 director Christiane Burkhard's film [Trazando Aleida](#) uncovered a chapter in Mexico's history that had previously gone unnoticed. The film tells the story of Aleida, a young woman who in the mid 2000s discovers that her parents are not her natural parents and that her biological grandmother is searching for her and her brother. The grandmother explains how the parents of the two children were "disappeared" in the dirty war waged in Mexico against oppositionists in the 1970s, the kind of counterinsurgency efforts seen in nearly every country in Latin America during that era. The filmmaker begins a two-pronged search. Together with Aleida she looks for Aleida's brother, who is eventually found in Washington, while also going on the trail of Aleida's parents in the Mexican state of Guerrero, where they had been active in a rural guerrilla.

The repression in Mexico in the 70s never reached the same proportions as that of the more recent dictatorships in Argentina or Chile. And Mexico always presented an image of itself as a progressive nation, offering refuge to leftist exiles from all over Latin America. The country has been controlled by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) since the 1920s in what the Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa described as the perfect dictatorship. In the late 1980s the political landscape opened up as social movements emerged that were independent of the established parties. A glimmer of hope.

The current situation in the Central American country is, however, often a cause for disappointment. And it's not just the slaughter of the students in Ayotzinapa in September 2014 or the many other massacres of refugees from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, who face widespread danger and brutality as they pass through Mexico on their way to the 'promised land' of the USA. The problem has now become more complex. In the past, authoritarian state forces used violent means to control resistant parts of the population. But now it's unclear which actors are behind the tens of thousands of deaths and over 20,000 disappearances recorded over the last few years. The Mexican state has long lost the monopoly on the use of violence and has had to relinquish control of certain territories to criminal gangs. Transnational corporations take advantage of this arrangement to appropriate land and resources. A disastrous situation.

But once again there is some cause for hope: The massive protests against the disappearance and murder of the students have spilled over national borders. Growing international solidarity with the victims puts pressure on President Peña Nieto's neoliberal government. In the few days I spend in Mexico at podium discussions in various universities and at meetings with human rights activists I meet plenty of young people, but also seasoned lawyers, who are taking political and legal action against the human rights violations. All of these people face great risk in this dangerous country – just like the tens of thousands of victims of torture, land grabs and exploitation. This is why they must be supported in their efforts to establish a democratic and corruption-free state based on the rule of law. As Europeans we also have a role to play here. Germany should end all questionable collaboration with the Mexican government, including the scandalous cooperation between the German and Mexican police forces. It must also stop the export of weapons into this murderous country and apply stricter controls on the activities of European companies in Mexico.

In light of the fate of those “disappeared” during the 70s we must ensure we do not let the violence and massacres of our time become another forgotten chapter in Mexican history.