“You Want the Truth? You Can’t Handle the Truth”:

Poetic Representations of the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre

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Abstract

The 1968 massacre of a student demonstration in La Plaza de las Tres Culturas, Tlatelolco district of Mexico City, has been the subject of ‘la literatura de Tlatelolco’, whose aim is to keep the event alive in collective memory and provide a ‘true’ account of the shooting. The juxtaposition of the official accounts and collective memory version of the event has long suggested that the latter is the ‘true’ record. But how ‘true’ are poetic representations of the massacre? Is there a coherent account of the shooting in Tlatelolco poetry? Is this account necessary to preserve the event in collective memory?

Keywords: Tlatelolco 1968, Tlatelolco poetry, hegemony, posthegemony, Rosario Castellanos, José Carlos Becerra, Eduardo Santos

In 1968, as Mexico was getting ready to host the Olympic Games, dissent among its population was growing. A series of strikes by doctors, ambulance staff and rail workers were held over the summer and early autumn. Student movement was growing, and many demonstrations and protests were organised by the CNH (Consejo Nacional de Huelga, the student strike committee, led by Raúl Álvarez Garín, Sócrates Campos Lemus, Marcelino Perelló, and Gilberto Guevara Niebla). On 23 July, the *granaderos* (paramilitary riot forces) entered Vocational School 5 in Mexico City to disperse a student demonstration; arguably, after this event the standoff between the state and students became openly violent.[[1]](#footnote-0) The confrontation between the government and students reached its pinnacle when an innocuous student demonstration in La Plaza de las Tres Culturas in the Tlatelolco district of Mexico City on 2 October ended in bloodshed.

It is widely accepted that the events of that evening developed as follows. The demonstration, organised by the CNH, started around 17:00 with the students arriving in the square. Police were present in the square; many sources also state that *granaderos* and the members of Batallón Olympia (a paramilitary group employed by the government as part of the security force for the upcoming Olympic Games) were called to the square. At 18:10 two green fireworks were shot from somewhere in the square.[[2]](#footnote-1) Then the police, *granaderos* and army entered the square in military vehicles and on foot, and opened fire on the demonstrators and bystanders. Panic ensued, as those in the square ran for cover into the apartment buildings; according to the eyewitnesses’ accounts, they were chased by the soldiers who continued firing indiscriminately.[[3]](#footnote-2) The number of dead and wounded remains unknown; John Rodda’s report in *The Guardian* cites 267 dead as the closest estimate,[[4]](#footnote-3) although much higher figures of over 1,000 dead have been cited in other publications.[[5]](#footnote-4) The figures reported by the official sources on 3 October 1968 were twenty dead and seventy-five wounded;[[6]](#footnote-5) these were amended on October 4 to thirty dead and fifty-three wounded.[[7]](#footnote-6) Considering the existence of many accounts of the massacre, it is inconceivable that the government would try to deny the obvious violation of human rights. Nonetheless, the government officials laid blame solely on the students and their parents: ‘El jefe de la policía capitalina, general Luis Cueto Ramírez, señaló ayer que en su parte, los padres de familia son los culpables de las recientes tragedias, porque no han sabido aconsejar o encauzar debidamente a sus hijos.’[[8]](#footnote-7)

Many Mexican intellectuals openly expressed their anger at the government’s crime; Octavio Paz, for example, left the post of cultural attaché to India and refused to participate in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games.[[9]](#footnote-8) Some wrote about the events to counteract the lack of accurate official information about the massacre.[[10]](#footnote-9) As a result, Mexican literature came to include ‘Tlatelolco literature’, an initially brief phenomenon, still kept alive by anniversary contributions. A sign of ‘a breakdown of the long-kept truce between the intelligentsia and the government’,[[11]](#footnote-10) Tlatelolco literature carried the message ‘that the ideals of the Revolution, so strongly defended by the party in power, had become empty’;[[12]](#footnote-11) disenchantment with the now corrupt image of PRI[[13]](#footnote-12) and frustration with the political climate characterize these works, which ranged from novels to poetry. It is thought that the phenomenon of ‘Tlatelolco literature’ was confined to a relatively small literary community because most writers were ‘committed to the writing of purely literary compositions’,[[14]](#footnote-13) although by 1968 there was a growing number of politically minded writers who were openly voicing their discontent with the regime (for example, Juan Bañuelos, Vicente Leñero, José Emilio Pacheco, Elena Poniatowska, to name but a few). The small number of works dedicated to the massacre may also be explained by the fact that only the writers living in Mexico City were concerned with the massacre; those in other parts of the country ‘were of course less affected by Tlatelolco, and are, therefore, less likely to write about it’.[[15]](#footnote-14)

The events of 2 October 1968 have been the subject of much sociological, cultural and literary research aiming to discover the ‘truth’ about the massacre. But what is the ‘truth’ sought here? Is it objective truth about the event? Or is it homogeneity in the representation of the massacre? If the nature of the texts purporting to tell ‘the truth’ about Tlatelolco is considered, the ‘truth’ is a detailed account of what happened in the square, with many memorable and poignant images. However, here are as many ‘truths’ about the massacre as there are accounts of it, so it would be impossible to achieve homogeneity in telling what happened on 2 October. A single, accurate and accepted account of the events never materialises; what unites these accounts is either a faithful reproduction of the government’s version of the events (in this case, the text can be seen as belonging to the state discourse corpus), or an equally faithful reproduction of the stories told by the students and residents who were in the square that evening (in this case, the text is seen as belonging to the *vox populi[[16]](#footnote-15)* corpus and is therefore expected to oppose what the state discourse is saying). This study hypothesizes that both state discourse and *vox populi* aim to preserve the symbolic value of the event within collective memory rather than create a single accurate account of the massacre.

This essay will examine the relationship between factual accuracy and emotional make-up of three poetic representations of the massacre written in 1968: ‘Memorial de Tlatelolco’ by Rosario Castellanos, ‘El espejo de piedra’ by José Carlos Becerra, and ‘Tlatelolco, 68’ by Jaime Sabines. These works can be seen as part of the corpus of vox populi’s reaction to the massacre, as they approach the representation of the event in a similar fashion, using similar images and aiming to elicit a similar reaction from their readers.

The theoretical foundation of the project includes the theories of hegemony and posthegemony in the context of Latin American cultural studies, with the focus on the relationship between the cognitive and affective perception of history. The examination of the process of preserving a historical event in collective memory will be informed by Paul Ricoeur’s view of the role of fiction in the representation of historical events.

The concept of hegemony has been the subject of numerous sociological and cultural studies which examine power relationships in modernity by juxtaposing hegemony and subalternity.[[17]](#footnote-16) The main principle of hegemony is consent-based power with force being ‘employed only secondary’.[[18]](#footnote-17) Wilful compliance on behalf of the public suggests a degree of discipline, which in turn indicates the cognitive nature of hegemony. However, it has been noted that hegemony fails to provide an all-pervading, sustainable system of control or dominance in society.[[19]](#footnote-18) Rather than reverting to the hegemony/counterhegemony juxtaposition, current studies on power and control in Latin America suggest an extension of hegemony beyond the usual ideological infrastructure into the affective domain of the collective conscience. In other words, an apparent orderly unity of hegemony is challenged by an apparent disorderly multiplicity of posthegemony.

In his studies of the nature of political power in Latin America, Beasley-Murray uses the term ‘posthegemony’, which he perceives as belonging primarily to the affective domain. He posits that posthegemony is ‘the shift from a rhetoric of persuasion to a regime in which what counts are the effects produced and orchestrated by affective investment in the social, if by affect we mean the order of bodies rather than the order of signification’.[[20]](#footnote-19) When examining the relationship between the state and masses, Franco interprets posthegemony as belonging to the ‘places in which hegemony ceases to make sense’,[[21]](#footnote-20) suggesting a move away from the cognitive process of understanding. Similarly, Williams sees posthegemony as a force which ‘resists appropriation by interrupting hegemony’s signifying processes’,[[22]](#footnote-21) and Yúdice considers posthegemony a sign of the state apparatus weakening and losing its unified cohesion.[[23]](#footnote-22) Posthegemony also implies multiple loci of control.[[24]](#footnote-23) In reference to multiple representations of a single historical event, this not only translates into a multitude of texts telling ‘the truth’ about the event, but also suggests that each text will be purporting – or indeed professing – to tell ‘*the* truth’ and therefore implicitly denying the existence of a single fully truthful account. This is particularly poignant when we compare various accounts of the Tlatelolco massacre only to find ourselves trawling through so many inconsistencies and contradictions.

In the absence of a single ‘truthful’ account of the massacre in the state/official discourse and the overall public distrust of all narratives state- and government-related, the role of literary discourse of the Tlatelolco massacre may be twofold. On the one hand, it aims to fill in the ‘truth’ gap by preserving an accurate account of the event in collective memory; on the other, it consoles the public by offering it a definite – or even finite - version of the event. Nothing is left to add; this is what happened, and the public regains control over the chaos of the unknown.

Ricoeur sees this twofold nature of fiction in a separation of ‘truthfulness and consolation’:

[Fiction] oscillates between the inescapable suspicion that fictions lie and deceive, to the extent that they console us, and the equally invincible conviction that fictions are not simply arbitrary, inasmuch as they respond to a need over which we are not the masters, the need to impress the stamp of order upon the chaos of existence, of sense upon nonsense, of concordance upon discordance.[[25]](#footnote-24)

It is recognised that a work of fiction is not designed to tell the ‘truth’ about a real past event. However, it would seem that such an assumption is valid when the past event is also recorded in any form of non-fictional discourse (regardless of whether those records are completely full or accurate). However, in the case of the Tlatelolco massacre, there is an assumption that no *accurate* official record of the massacre exists – if the newspapers lie, as do state documents, press conference records, and other texts produced or endorsed by the state, then the only other source of the ‘truth’ about the event is *vox populi* (including literature). The public then is consoled not by the *a priori* notion of the untruthfulness of literature, but by the fact that literature is a source of truth. It appears that Ricoeur’s analysis of the (un)truthfulness of fiction needs adjusting in the context of the Tlatelolco massacre: here, literature does indeed stamp order upon chaos and, by doing so, consoles the public. I would suggest that the action of stamping order assigns the Tlatelolco literature a high degree of truthfulness because the works of literature are seen by collective conscience as filling the gap in historical discourse and doing so differently from the state discourse and, therefore, truthfully.

If the official historical discourse is the representation of hegemony, vox populi is largely posthegemonic. Official discourse is based upon the ownership of knowledge, which is supposed to be as ‘objective’ as possible, with little or no emotions involved. In this case, the absence of emotions constitutes discipline stemming from the ability to process, retain and use objective knowledge to protect order in society. Vox populi tends to be emotionally charged and artistic representations of the massacre are particularly emotional. It is possible that in this case, the level of emotional involvement determines the degree of ‘truth’ of the knowledge of the massacre held by vox populi. Since emotions are the basis of the power distribution in the posthegemonic setting, from the posthegemonic perspective the absence of emotions indicates the absence of accurate knowledge; in the case of a historical account, this knowledge would be regarded as the truth about what happened. However, since emotions are subjective and circumstantial, the ‘truth’ based upon them would also be subjective. Does that mean that vox populi represents historical ‘truth’ just as inaccurately as the official discourse, *a priori* corrupt because of the corrupt politics behind it? If so, neither hegemony nor posthegemony hold monopoly on objective historical knowledge or have complete control over the accuracy of the representation of a historical event.

The three poems analysed in this essay are representative of the trends in Tlatelolco poetry. In an earlier study, I defined some of these trends and concluded that many poems about the massacre (especially those dealing with its aftermath) focus on the relationship between ‘us’, the victims and those who sympathise with them) and ‘them’ (the government), and ‘the progression of both constructs within the context of the individual’s perception of society’s reaction to the shooting’.[[26]](#footnote-25) The emotional foundation of this development is that of anger, disbelief and shame; as time goes by, apathy and indifference surface in place of stronger feelings. While the emotional aspect of the representations of the Tlatelolco massacre remains important, I would question the assumption shared by so many analysts of the massacre that there is one ‘truth’ which needs to be known. For that purpose, I will concentrate on the way the poems studied here depict the massacre and whether the truth about the massacre or the symbolic value of the event dominate the poetic narrative.

The key images in the Tlatelolco poetry are silence, words and stones (rocks, tombs or walls). Most poems are written in the first person singular (‘yo’, I) or plural (‘nosotros’, we). I have argued elsewhere that the use of the first person creates unity between the narrator, reader and victims of the massacre, thus presupposing emotional unanimity and shared context.[[27]](#footnote-26) In other words, ‘nosotros’ suggests that all concerned view the event from the same perspective, both cognitive and emotional.

Stones represent tombs (and therefore silence) and monuments which remind ‘us’ about the event, thus keeping it alive in collective memory. Monuments commemorate those who should be remembered – sometimes named, sometimes unnamed. Often in public view, monuments are difficult to misinterpret. The monument in La Plaza de las Tres Culturas, erected on 2 October 1993, is dedicated to 20 named victims of the massacre and ‘muchos otros compañeros cuyos nombres y edades aún no conocemos’. It is interesting to note that the number of dead corresponds to the first report of the casualties in Tlatelolco (‘Veinte muertos, 75 heridos y 400 presos’[[28]](#footnote-27)). Next day, October 4, the number of casualties was increased to 30 (‘30 muertos, 53 heridos graves; más de 1,500 presos; actos aislados de violencia’[[29]](#footnote-28)). A much larger number of 300-400 is often cited as the closest to reality (see Meyer and Sherman 1979: 669-70). One wonders why the monument, created twenty-five years after the massacre, uses a quickly outdated number of casualties. It is not that the other number is not immediately available; from the point of view of the year the monument was designed, a gap of several days or even ten years in reporting a larger number is all but nonexistent. It is possible that the first report about the massacre stirred the most emotions and therefore remained the most memorable in collective conscience.

At the bottom of the stone, there is a stanza from Rosario Castellanos’ poem ‘Memorial de Tlatelolco’, which states that the next day after the massacre ‘los periódicos dieron como noticia principal el estado de tiempo’.[[30]](#footnote-29) We will discuss this sentence later; for now, suffice it to say that a highly emotional tone of the inscription serves to associate the massacre with the sentiments of grief and outrage in the collective conscience.

Silence ascribed to stone serves dual purpose. On the one hand, while nothing is being said out loud, the image and memory are visible to and shared by all who see it. The memory is designed (and controlled) by those who create the monument, and shared by the sympathetic public. This is the most common occurrence of the image of stone in Tlatelolco poetry possibly because the danger of forgetting the event is real. This is reflected in the absence of informative discourse 10 days after the event, when public attention was refocused on the Olympic Games and the country’s glory. The urge to remember the massacre is also evident in the references to ‘olvidar’ (to forget),[[31]](#footnote-30) and ‘recordar’ (to remember). Another danger is that the event will be misinterpreted and preserved in the collective memory ‘wrongly’; this suggests that collective conscience – or, at least, the part of it that creates vox populi – realises that the state discourse will lie, deny or ‘forget’ the event. Thus, vox populi has to remember the event and tell the truth to keep the massacre from disappearing from collective memory or from being changed from the way vox populi tells it. On the other hand, silence refers to the echelons of power purposefully silencing the students at the demonstration or those who want to ‘speak the truth’ about the event. Another way of silencing is by forgetting the event; this is the realm of the apathetic collective conscience forgetting the event as the links between it and collective memory are erased forcibly or otherwise.[[32]](#footnote-31)

José Carlos Becerra’s poem ‘El espejo de la piedra’ was first published on November 6, 1968 *in La Cultura en México*, making Becerra ‘uno de los primeros poetas que protestaron contra el crimen’.[[33]](#footnote-32) We will concentrate on the following excerpt:

Detrás de la iglesia de Santiago-Tlatelolco, treinta años de paz

más otros treinta años de paz,

más todo el acero y el cemento empleados en construir la escenografía para las fiestas del fantasmagórico país,

más todos los discursos

salieron por la boca de las ametralladoras.

Lava extendiéndose para borrar lo que iba tocando, lo que iba hacienda suyo,

para traerlo a la piedra del ídolo nuevamente.

¿Pero lo trajo de nuevo a la piedra del ídolo?

¿Pero tantos y tantos muertos por la lava de otros treinta años de paz,

terminarán en la paz digestiva de Huitzilopochtli.

Se llevaron los muertos quién sabe adónde.

Llenaron de estudiantes las cárceles de la ciudad.

Pero al jade y a las plumas y al estofado de los estípites y a los nuevos palacios que ya no construyó Boari, y a los desayunos en Sanborn’s,

se les rompió por fin el discurso.

Y cuando intenten recoger esos fragmentos de ruido para contemplarse,

encontrarán en ellos solamente

a los muertos hablándoles.

(Becerra 2008: 214-15)

Here, as in other poems, the normality of everyday life is destroyed by violence. Machine guns are given a voice (‘boca de las ametralladoras’; ‘más todos los discursos / salieron por boca de las ametralladoras’[[34]](#footnote-33)), while the students are reduced to the filling for prisons (‘llenaron de estudiantes las cárceles de la ciudad’).[[35]](#footnote-34) An inadvertent animation of an inanimate object (machine gun) and consequent de-animation of human beings empowers those who use the guns and put students in jail, implying that those in power are initially inanimate and devoid of emotions. However, there is someone else who speaks in the poem – the dead: ‘los muertos hablándoles’.[[36]](#footnote-35) This image of the dead talking to the living appears in other poems; the dialogue between the living and the dead is dominated and guided by the latter, who set the tone and define the expected emotional response.[[37]](#footnote-36) It is interesting that this poem, focused primarily on the historical context of the massacre, appears after the poem ‘Problemas en el encendido’ (‘Problems at the Beginning’), which uses a lot of phrases and structures similar to the state and media discourse of Mexican revolutionary values. Although not directly connected to the massacre, this poem presents an interesting bridge between the state and vox populi. By adopting lengthy and complex sentence structures, it masquerades as a piece of state propaganda; by inserting references to ‘el sueño de la historia’, ‘un gesto velado, una vaga alusión en una comida o en el entierro de un compinche ilustre’,[[38]](#footnote-37) it takes up the role of the popular voice in opposition to the state discourse. At the same time, it distances itself from both in the last line ‘revelará un problema / del cual un día todo el pueblo tendrá finalmente que encargarse’.[[39]](#footnote-38) The narrator knows what the problem is, but the nation does not – it will be revealed later, probably in ‘El espejo de piedra’, which follows this poem.

‘Problemas en el encendido’ also offers an intriguing piece of advice about dreams (which is really about history because the dream is that of history): ‘si el sueño está agrietado es preciso cambiarlo’.[[40]](#footnote-39) Dreams and their effect on perceived reality appear in other Tlatelolco poems, which is why this particular work is analysed together with Becerra’s contribution to the Tlatelolco poetic discourse. If the dream is Mexican history and this history is now ‘cracking’ (or, arguably, not following the path laid out by the revolution), it should be re-written to fit the prescribed pattern, which is what is being done with the Tlatelolco massacre. But is this wrong, especially if the re-writing of history is done by the collective conscience in order to reinforce the need to remember events such as 2 October 1968? The hegemonic representation of the massacre ‘está agrietado’ under the pressure of inconsistencies and omissions, so it should be replaced with a different (posthegemonic) representation which would either restore the ‘truth’ about it or create a new, more stable version informed by the affective domain and therefore immune to the absence of a single accurate account.

ANALYSE??? Jamie Sabines’s ‘Tlatelolco, 68’ is one of the best known poems about the massacre. The first of its six parts echoes the familiar sentiments of grief over the loss of so many lives and anger at how quickly the country switched its attention to the Olympic Games:

Nadie sabe el número exacto de los muertos,

ni siquiera los asesinos,

ni siquiera el criminal.

(Ciertamente, ya llegó a la historia

este hombre pequeño por todas partes,

incapaz de todo menos del rencor.)

Tlatelolco será mencionado en los años que vienen

como hoy hablamos de Río Blanco y Cananea,

pero esto fue peor,

aquí han matado al pueblo:

no eran obreros parapetados en la huelga,

eran mujeres y niños, estudiantes,

jovencitos de quince años,

una muchacha que iba al cine,

una criatura en el vientre de su madre,

todos barridos, certeramente acribillados

por la metralla del Orden y la Justicia Social.

A los tres días, el ejército era la víctima de los desalmados,

y el pueblo se aprestaba jubiloso

a celebrar las Olimpiadas, que darían gloria a México.

(Campos y Toledo 1996: 48)

Another poem that calls for preserving the memory of the massacre in the collective conscience is ‘Memorial de Tlatelolco’ by Rosario Castellanos.

La oscuridad engendra la violencia  
y la violencia pide oscuridad  
para cuajar el crimen.  
Por eso el dos de octubre aguardó hasta la noche  
Para que nadie viera la mano que empuñaba  
El arma, sino sólo su efecto de relámpago.  
  
¿Y a esa luz, breve y lívida, quién? ¿Quién es el que mata?  
¿Quiénes los que agonizan, los que mueren?  
¿Los que huyen sin zapatos?  
¿Los que van a caer al pozo de una cárcel?  
¿Los que se pudren en el hospital?  
¿Los que se quedan mudos, para siempre, de espanto?  
  
¿Quién? ¿Quiénes? Nadie. Al día siguiente, nadie.  
La plaza amaneció barrida; los periódicos  
dieron como noticia principal  
el estado del tiempo.  
Y en la televisión, en el radio, en el cine  
no hubo ningún cambio de programa,  
ningún anuncio intercalado ni un  
minuto de silencio en el banquete.  
(Pues prosiguió el banquete.)  
  
No busques lo que no hay: huellas, cadáveres  
que todo se le ha dado como ofrenda a una diosa,  
a la Devoradora de Excrementos.  
  
No hurgues en los archivos pues nada consta en actas.  
Mas he aquí que toco una llaga: es mi memoria.  
Duele, luego es verdad. Sangre con sangre  
y si la llamo mía traiciono a todos.  
  
Recuerdo, recordamos.  
Ésta es nuestra manera de ayudar a que amanezca  
sobre tantas conciencias mancilladas,  
sobre un texto iracundo sobre una reja abierta,  
sobre el rostro amparado tras la máscara.  
Recuerdo, recordamos  
hasta que la justicia se siente entre nosotros.

(Castellanos, Poesía, pp. 297-98)

Here, the level of emotions is also quite high. There are multiple structural repetitions, such as questions ‘¿Quién? ¿Quiénes?’, ‘¿Los que…’,[[41]](#footnote-40) prepositional phrases (‘en la televisión, en la radio, en el cine’, ‘sobre tantas conciencias mancilladas, / sobre un texto iracundo, sobre una reja abierta, / sobre el rostro amparado tras la máscara’[[42]](#footnote-41)), the word ‘ningún’ (ibid.). There is also a very telling sentence ‘La plaza amaneció barrida: los periódicos / dieron como noticia principal / el estado de tiempo’.[[43]](#footnote-42) The two nouns encircling ‘amaneció barrida’ are reminiscent of the square where the massacre happened, evoking the image of the event in the reader’s mind; the next two gradually shortening lines focus the reader’s attention on the incongruity of ‘noticia principal’ and ‘estado de tiempo’. The irony in the concentration of the reader’s attention on something so trivial being presented as the main news of the day once again reveals the affective foundation of this memory – the reader is more likely to have a strong emotional reaction, such as anger and rage (both ‘ira’ and ‘rabia’ appear in many Tlatelolco poems) than question whether this was indeed the case. Curiously, it was not – on October 3, most of the A section of *Excelsior* was dedicated mostly to the Tlatelolco massacre, with the headlines on the front page reading ‘Veinte muertos, 75 heridos y 400 presos’, ‘“No habrá estado de sitio”, Afirma García Barragán’ (this appeared right under the newspaper title), ‘Recio combate al dispersar el ejército un mitín de huelguistas’ (straight after the previous heading). The obvious question to ask, then, is why would this statement be made in the poem that insists upon ‘justicia’ and abhors ‘oscuridad’ that breeds violence? Surely, *Excelsior* was available at the time that the poem was written; although the poem does not state which newspapers are being discussed, *Excelsior* would be one of them since it was Mexico City’s largest and most popular daily newspaper. Other newspapers, such as a more left-wing *¿Por qué?* and a magazine *¡Siempre!* also published articles about the massacre.

So, are these poems trying to deny the existing evidence or re-write each other’s version of the ‘truth’? Do some of them question whether the newspapers were publishing the truth about the event? I would hypothesize that it is immaterial whether what was published was true or not; what matters is the reader’s emotional reaction to the statements similar to Castellanos’s ‘los periódicos / dieron como noticia principal / el estado de tiempo’. And rest assured, the emotions will run high because the text is constructed so as to elicit the strongest response and, arguably, manipulate the public’s reaction to the state discourse about the massacre. It has been noted that Mexican public has little trust in newspapers;[[44]](#footnote-43) in the case of an open conflict between the government and the students, the public would be expected to maintain this distrust. And if we refer back to the earlier theoretical discussion we would consider newspaper texts to be representative of hegemonic power, whereas the poetic discourse would epitomize posthegemonic control. The inconsistency between the two discourses indicates that poetic discourse does not seek an accurate representation of the event. But it does seek a particular emotional response to be safeguarded in the collective conscience.

In conclusion, there are two mechanisms of preserving the Tlatelolco massacre in the nation’s collective conscience: one is hegemonic (initially dominated by the state and media discourse), and the other is posthegemonic (represented here by the poetic discourse, which is part of the vox populi). However, it is conceivable that such a clear-cut division between the state and vox populi is too simplistic, since neither appear to be consistent or, indeed, homogenous in their depiction of the massacre. The fragmentation of the state discourse is expressed predominantly in the discrepancies in the reports of the number of casualties and the role of the military and the police in the events of 2 October 1968. These inconsistencies are pointed out (often rather emotionally) by many analysts as the signs of the government concealing the truth about Tlatelolco. On the other hand, the vox populi is seen as a homogenous truthful narrative of the massacre. Many literary works and academic analyses call for or purport to tell ‘toda la verdad’ (the whole truth; as cited in the title of Juan Miguel de Mora’s 1973 quasi-testimonial work[[45]](#footnote-44)). But is the *vox populi* all that homogenous and does it tell a reliable, accurate story of the Tlatelolco massacre? This study comes to the conclusion that neither hegemonic nor posthegemonic discourse produces or even seeks to produce an accurate representation of the event. Instead, the two systems control the cognitive and affective domains of the collective conscience; [RE-PHRASE???] the accuracy of the representation of the massacre becomes secondary to this process.

Notes

1. For the discussions of the nature of the Mexican student movement and the conflict between Mexico City’s university and polytechnic students and the police and army, see Gilberto Balam, *Tlatelolco: reflexiones de un testigo*, Mexico City, Talleres Lenasas, 1969, Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999, pp. 119–31 and Michael Meyer, William Sherman and Susan Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History*, 8th edn., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 583–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. See, for example, Roberto Blanco Moheno, *Tlatelolco: historia de una infamia*, Mexico City, Editorial Diana, 1969, p. 279, Jorge Volpi, *La imaginación y el poder: Una historia intelectual de 1968,* Mexico City, Biblioteca Era, 1998, pp. 327–8 and Meyer et al, *Mexican History*, pp. 586–7. Some accounts suggest that the fireworks were launched later from a helicopter circling the square (Balam, *Tlatelolco*, p. 97 and Judith Hellman, *Mexico in Crisis*, New York, Holmes and Meier, 1978, p. 141). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. There are many emotional accounts of the massacre in Elena Poniatowska, *La noche de Tlatelolco: Testimonios de historia oral,* Mexico City, Biblioteca Era, 2008 [1971], pp. 168–76 and Juan Miguel de Mora, *Tlatelolco 1968: por fin toda la verdad*, Mexico City, Editores Asociados, 1973, pp. 122–30. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. John Rodda, ‘“Prensa, Prensa”: A Journalist’s Reflections on Mexico ‘68’, in Keith Brewster (ed.), *Reflections on Mexico ’68*, Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp., 11–22, p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Hellman, *Mexico in Crisis*, p. 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. *Excelsior*, 3 October 1968, p. 1A. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. *Excelsior*, 4 October 1968, p. 1A. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. *Excelsior*, 4 October 1968: 1A. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. See Elena Poniatowska, *Octavio Paz: Las palabras del árbol*, Mexico City, Plaza Janés, 1998, pp. 126–31 for Octavio Paz’s letter to the Olympic Committee and excerpts from his interview given in Paris on 15 November 1968, where he expresses his views on the reasons for the massacre and rationalizes his decision to resign. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. Of these, Carlos Monsiváis’s essay *Días de guardar* (1970) is arguably the best known non-fiction analysis of the massacre. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. Dolly Young, ‘Mexican Literary Reactions to Tlatelolco 1968’, *Latin American Research Review*, 20:2, 1985, pp. 71-85, p. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. Luis Leal, ‘Tlatelolco, Tlatelolco’, *Denver Quarterly*, 14:1, 1979, pp. 3–13, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Partido Revolucionario Institucional, Mexico’s ruling party since 1929. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. Leal, ‘Tlatelolco, Tlatelolco’, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. The term *vox populi* will be used to denote the texts produced outside the government structure. Although it is recognised that many Mexican intellectuals have been incorporated into the state structures (Octavio Paz, for example, served as Mexico’s cultural ambassador to India; Rosario Castellanos was a cultural ambassador to Israel), Tlatelolco massacre signalled a deep seated discord between the intellectuals and the government. Open condemnation of the massacre by such writers and public figures as Octavio Paz, Rosario Castellanos, José Carlos Becerra, René Avilés Fabila among others, indicated that the uneasy truce between the intellectuals and the government (as described by Young, ‘Literary Reactions’, p. 82) was no longer sustainable. A new discourse separated itself (arguably, not completely) from the state discourse and took on a new role of telling ‘the truth’, since the government was unlikely to do so. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. Recent discussions of the nature and role of hegemony in Latin America are Jesús Martín–Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony*, trans. Elizabeth Fox and Robert A. White, London, Sage Publications, 1993; Neil Larsen, *Reading North by South: On Latin American Literature, Culture, and Politics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1995, Horacio Legrás, ‘Subalternity and Negativity’, *Dispositio/n,* 22, 2000, pp. 83–102; Alberto Moreiras, *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001; and Gareth Williams, *The Other Side of the Popular: Neoliberalism and Subalternity in Latin America,* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. Jon Beasley–Murray, *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2010, p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. See Larsen, *Reading North by South*, pp. 90–4 and Jon Beasley–Murray, ‘On Posthegemony’, *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 22:1, 2003, 118–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. Beasley–Murray, ‘On Posthegemony’, p. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. Jean Franco, ‘Latin American Intellectuals and Collective Identity’, *Social Identities* 3:2, 1997, 270. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
22. Williams, *The Other Side of the Popular*, 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
23. George Yúdice, ‘Civil Society, Consumption, and Governmentality in an Age of Global Restructuring: An Introduction’, *Social Text* 13:4, 1995, pp. 1–25, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
24. Beasley–Murray, ‘On Posthegemony’, pp. 120–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
25. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol.2, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1985, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
26. Victoria Carpenter, ‘The Echo of Tlatelolco in Contemporary Mexican Protest Poetry’ *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 24:4, 2005, pp. 496–512 (p. 511). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
27. Carpenter, ‘The Echo of Tlatelolco’. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
28. *Excelsior*, 3 October 1968, p. 1A. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
29. *Excelsior*, 4 October 1968, p. 1A. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
30. Rosario Castellanos, *Poesía no eres tú: Obra poética 1948–1971*, Mexico City, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1972, p. 298. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
31. The phrase ‘Dos de octubre no se olvida’ is chanted at the events dedicated to the memory of the victims of the massacre. Examples include Paco Ignacio Taibo II, ‘Casi 40 años y no se olvida’, *La Jornada*, 2 October 2007, http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2007/10/02/nota1.php, accessed 29 July 2013; Rubén Cárdenas, ‘Ni se olvida, ni se apaga el 2 de octubre’, *El Siglo de Durango*, 3 October 2011, http://www.elsiglodedurango.com.mx/noticia/331409.ni–se–olvida–ni–se–apaga–el–2–de–octubre.html, accessed 15 May 2013, and other publications about the anniversary of the massacre. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
32. See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992 [1941, 1952], p. 172 for the analysis of the process of collective forgetting. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
33. José Carlos Becerra, *El otoño recorre las islas*, Mexico City, Biblioteca Era, 2008 [1973], p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
34. Becerra, *El otoño,* pp.214-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
35. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
36. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
37. In some poems (‘Tlatelolco 68’ by Jaime Sabines, ‘Intermitencias del oeste (III)’ by Octavio Paz, ‘Nueve años después’ by David Huerta) this response is shame. See Carpenter, ‘The Echo of Tlatelolco’, for a detailed analysis of the expression of shame in the Tlatelolco poetry. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
38. Becerra, *El otoño,* p. 214. The reference to a meal is similar to the line in Rosario Castellanos’s poem: ‘ni un minuto de silencio en el banquete’ (Castellanos, *Poesía*, p. 298). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
39. Becerra, *El otoño,* p. 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
40. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
41. Castellanos, *Poesía*, p. 297. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
42. Idem, p. 298. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
43. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
44. For the discussion of the nature of the Mexican press see Cosío Villegas, *El sistema político mexicano*, 56; Hellman, *Mexico in Crisis*, p. 4; Guillermo Enríquez Simoní, *La libertad de prensa en México: una mentira rosa*, México City, B. Costa–Amic, Editor, 1967, p. 124; Consuelo Medal, *El periodista como orientador social*, Mexico City, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1965, pp. 96–7; and Evelyn Stevens, *Protest and Response in Mexico,* Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1974, pp. 32–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
45. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)