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"Mexico, 1968": Among Olympic Fanfares, Government Repression and Genocide

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Abstract

Tlatelolco – which in ***Nahuatl*** means the place of the mound – is currently located at the heart of the city of Mexico, and it was the scene of dramatic events during the last centuries. The pre-Columbian founding of the settlement dates back to the sixteenth century. It took place on a small islet in Texcoco lake. Tlatelolco flourished under the Aztec hegemony, and it was the seat of the most important market in the New World (Gibson 1980). Nevertheless, the city's progress was interrupted by the fall of the twin cities of Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco on August 13, 1521. When the Spanish conquest was over, the vanquished stayed in Tlatelolco, and the Spaniards stayed in Mexico-Tenochtitlan (Berlin and Barlow 1980:75).

Once Tlatelolco turned into an "aboriginal town," it lost its political and economic importance at the hands of Mexico: the seat of the viceroyal powers. Since 1531, Franciscan friars intended to convert the indigenous peoples to Catholicism. They also constructed several buildings: a church to honor Santiago (St. James), a monastery, and a "school to make Indians study" (Villaseñor y Sánchez 1980:133). These structures were located in the center of the settlement, surrounding the plaza (Villaseñor y Sánchez 1980; Barlow 1987). After gaining independence in 1821, and once the "Indian Republics" were abolished, Tlatelolco survived as an impoverished neighborhood with houses in ruins. It gradually grew during the twentieth century, until it was included in an urban renewal project in the 1960s. This project involved the construction of apartment buildings, the

Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores’ skyscraper (Department of International Relations’ skyscraper), and the development of an archaeological area. Many of the buildings which made up the sacred precinct of the pre-Hispanic city were left open (González Rul 1988). They blended in with the buildings near downtown Mexico City.

Keywords

Physical Anthropologist Death Toll Dead Body Truth Commission Documentary Source

These keywords were added by machine and not by the authors. This process is experimental and the keywords may be updated as the learning algorithm improves.

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And to that livid flash of light… who is it?, who is the killer? Who are the ones who breathe their last and die?

Who are the one who run away without their shoes on?

Who are the ones who go to a prison cell?

Who are the ones whose bodies decompose at the hospital?

Who are the ones who are left forever speechless with horror?

…

Do not look for what you cannot find: traces, dead bodies

…

Do not look in the files; nothing was registered there

…

I remember… let’s remember

This is the only way we can help to shed light on

a stained consciousness,

a furious text, an open gate,

a face hidden behind a mask

I remember… let’s remember

until justice could be felt among all of us”

(Tlatelolco memorial – Castellanos 1995:296)

From the ancient city of tlatelli to plaza de las tres culturas

Tlatelolco – which in ***Nahuatl*** means the place of the mound – is currently located at the heart of the city of Mexico, and it was the scene of dramatic events during the last centuries. The pre-Columbian founding of the settlement dates back to the sixteenth century. It took place on a small islet in Texcoco lake. Tlatelolco flourished under the Aztec hegemony, and it was the seat of the most important market in the New World (Gibson 1980). Nevertheless, the city's progress was interrupted by the fall of the twin cities of Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco on August 13, 1521. When the Spanish conquest was over, the vanquished stayed in Tlatelolco, and the Spaniards stayed in Mexico-Tenochtitlan (Berlin and Barlow 1980:75).

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Plaza de las Tres Culturas was formed in this way, at the center of the architectural complex where aboriginal traditions mixed with Hispanic and modern Mexican symbols (Fig. 10.1). On October 2, 1968, 10 days after the start of the XIX Olympic Games, Plaza de las Tres Culturas witnessed the horrific murder of students (Labastida 1998) at the hands of the repressive state apparatus. This genocide took more lives than the 1985 earthquake, when the forces of nature made several buildings of the housing unit of Tlatelolco collapse.

Fig. 10.1

Panoramic view of Plaza de las Tres Culturas. ***Foreground***: structures of the pre-Columbian city and Santiago's church. ***Background***: Chihuahua building – Tlatelolco housing unit (Photo by Martínez Herrera, 2005)

"Poor Mexico, So Far from God and So Close to the United States"[1]

Since the first supposedly democratic government in the 1920s, the modern history of Mexico has been continuously bathed in the blood of workers, government opponents, farmers, indigenous peoples, members of rival political parties and students (Labastida 1998).

Throughout the twentieth century, for more than seven decades and unlike most Latin American countries, only one political party (the ***Partido Revolucionario Institucional*** – PRI, Institutional Revolutionary Party) ruled Mexico, achieving success through all kind of illegal and obscure mechanisms (Story 1986; Reding 1995). This dictatorship largely depended on the control of workers and farmers' organizations, the infiltration of government agents into students' associations, and the management of the economic and political system to benefit those who concentrated power and money.

Public narratives were controlled by the government. The media were at the mercy of authoritarianism and censorship (Reding 1995; Monsiváis 2001:22). Mexican history was clearly written beforehand. The United States had to worry little about Mexican stability or the Communist threat in the southern frontier. Since the beginning of the Cold War and the red-hunt, the government of Mexico welcomed American military advisors and

CIA agents. FBI and CIA reports and activities made it possible (and probably still make it possible) to maintain stability and guarantee foreing investment, capitalizing the poverty of the population.

According to Agee (1975:503), a CIA detractor, the operations conducted in Latin America at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s not only intended to fight leftist movements, but also to strengthen the position of those in power. The latter were closely connected to financial activities and the United States government. They were interested in stability and making enormous profits from investments. The unequal distribution of wealth and the miserable living conditions in the country encouraged the creation of extreme political movements influenced by socialist ideas. The governments of Mexico and the United States wanted to eliminate these movements, as they posed a serious threat to capitalism.

Everything is possible in peace

In the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, foreign investment and the exploitation of natural resources stimulated industrialization and economic development. In this context, Mexico became an appropriate candidate city for the XIX Olympic Games. 1968 was a year of social unrest, associated with youth-led protests in Europe and the Americas. Mexican President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz earmarked a large sum of money (140 million dollars coming from international private capitals and the waste of national funds – Mabry 1982) to guarantee that the country was ready to receive sportsmen and tourists from all over the world.

The Olympic torch came from Greece under the motto "everything is possible in peace." It was going to light the recently remodeled stadium of the Autonomous National University of Mexico (the new Olympic Stadium) during the opening ceremony on October 12, 1968. The success of the event would be guaranteed at all costs. The ruling party wanted to be internationally acknowledged for maintaining an image of political stability and economic progress under the protection of American imperialism (Paz 1970). Nevertheless, once demagogy was left aside, reality was completely different. Despite its image of wealth and abundance, Mexico was "a country with 20 million hungry people and 10 million illiterate people, a country where a little political group stayed in power and imposed its own truth and law" (Ramírez 1998a:218, the translation is ours).

The 1968 Mexican student movement (Fig. 10.2) was the historical result of a decade of government repression on educational and working institutions. It was closely connected to the lack of economic support for popular education, the breaking up of protests, and the extrajudicial arrest of progressive trade union leaders who became political prisoners.

Fig. 10.2

Organization of the 1968 student movement (taken from Anaya 1969:16)

At first, students organized themselves spontaneously. They were particularly concerned about university and educational problems in the country. Later, in a context of increasing political authoritarianism, they expected to defy and confront PRI's despotic control (Álvarez Garín 2002:165, 167). The students rejected government domination and despotism, and they demanded an open dialog between the state and society. People wanted to enjoy freedom and democracy (Montes 1998), but they knew they were difficult to achieve while the ***PRI*** remained in power. Nevertheless, it is necessary to make it clear that students had no intention of overthrowing the government. Although several members of leftist organizations participated in the movement, they respected its democratic structure and leading positions (Álvarez Garín 2002).

Police and army forces reacted with violence in a skirmish among pre-university students from rival public institutions which occurred near downtown on July 22, 1968. They even used bazookas against students in several demonstrations. They also used them against the educational buildings that the students had previously occupied as a sign of protest. By the end of July, there were 1,200 people under arrest and 400 people injured. There were rumors that the death toll rose to 200. Most people condemned the action of police and military agents in assaulting the ***Instituto Politécnico Nacional*** (National Polytechnic Institute) and the ***Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*** (Autonomous National University of Mexico) (Menéndez Rodríguez 1968a).

The ***Consejo Nacional de Huelga*** (National Strike Council) was established at the beginning of August. It was made up of students and teachers of the ***Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México***, the ***Instituto Politécnico Nacional***, and several private and state schools and universities. The ***Consejo Nacional de Huelga*** had headquarters all over the country, and they decided to interrupt classes (Menéndez Rodríguez 1968a;

Ramírez 1998b:81). On August 4, the student movement submitted a petition asking for (Menéndez Rodríguez 1968b):

1. 1.

   Freedom for political prisoners.

2. 2.

   Abolition of the Federal Legal Code defining the crime of “social dissolution.” These articles allowed the government to break up student demonstrations.[2]

3. 3.

   Dissolution of police shock troops known as “granaderos.”

4. 4.

   Dismissal of police chiefs.

5. 5.

   Compensation for victims’ relatives (dead and injured people involved in the conflict).

6. 6.

   Define government employees’ responsibility in the bloodbath.

Railroad workers, teachers, intellectuals, leftist organizations and other social groups finally joined the students (Fig. 10.3). They created a resistance movement based on moral indignation, anti-authoritarianism, and the fight for human rights (Ponce 1998).

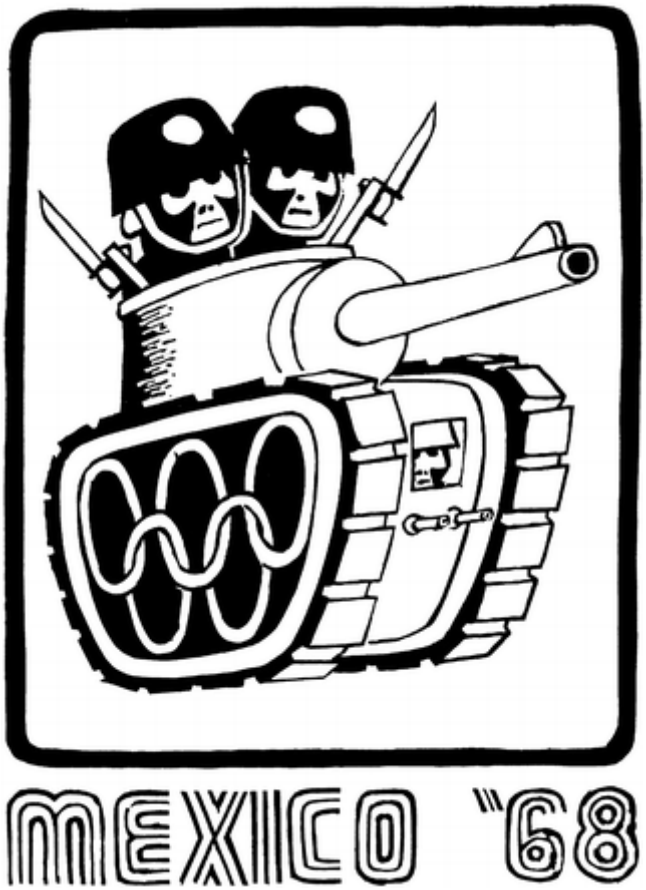

Fig. 10.3

Protest flyer of the 1968 student movement (Particular collection)

There were several massive demonstrations in August and September. One of them was attended by 300,000 people who reached the Zocalo, in front of the National Palace. Several police officers were assigned to go undercover as students. They acted as agitators. They pretended to share extreme leftist ideas, but they committed acts of vandalism with the aim of gaining public support for government repression. The government stated that the student movement was part of a communist conspiracy[3] (Menéndez Rodríguez 1968a). There was no answer to the ***Consejo Nacional de Huelga's*** demands. Most of them were discredited by Díaz Ordaz, who rejected dialog and stated that he was more than qualified to guarantee national security. The president made it clear he did not want any problems whatsoever during the Olympic Games (Ramírez 1998a).

For this reason, government repression continued. On September 18, military forces occupied the ***Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México's*** campus, violating university autonomy. Demonstrations and clashes between police/military forces and students did not stop (Ramírez 1998a, 1998b). Social discontent grew, information was officially manipulated, the number of dead and arrested people was concealed, and the president did not consider the petition. In that context, the ***Consejo Nacional de Huelga*** called for a meeting. The ***Consejo*** decided to organize a new demonstration on October 2, at Plaza de las Tres Culturas (Fig. 10.4) – a huge place where people could gather, as in the case of

demonstrations held on September 7 and 27 (Ramírez 1998a). Neither the organizers nor the people in the demonstration suspected that Tlatelolco was about to become the scene of one of the most horrific genocides in recent Mexican history.

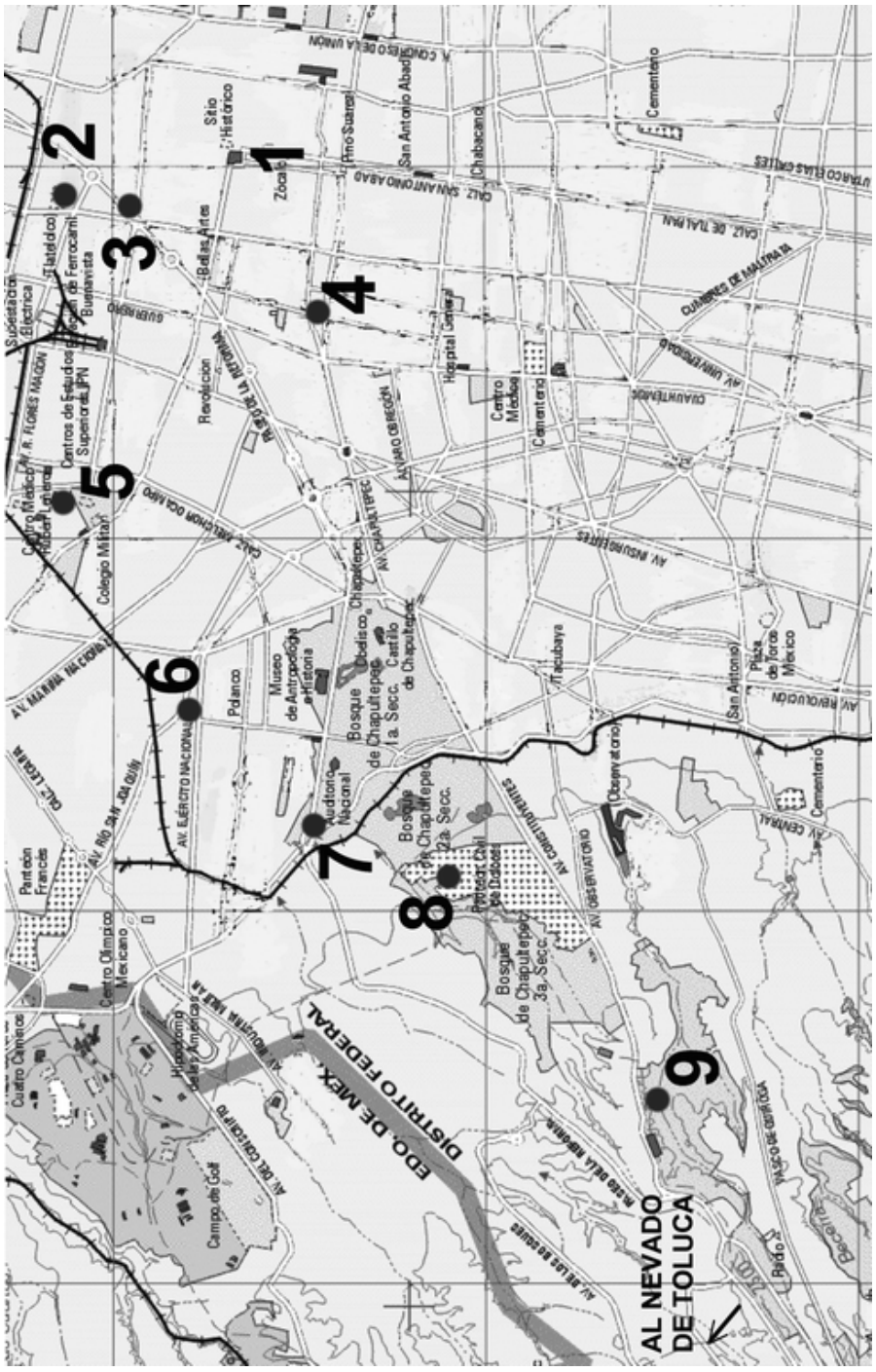

Fig. 10.4

Map of the central-western area of Mexico City, Federal District. Here it is possible to find some of the places mentioned throughout the text: 1. National Palace, 2. Tlatelolco: Plaza de las Tres Culturas, 3. ‘3° Delegación del Ministerio Público’, 4. ‘Servicio Médico Forense’, 5. Green Cross (Rubén

Lereño Hospital), 6. Red Cross, 7. Campo Marte, 8. Panteón Civil de Dolores, 9. Campo Militar No 1. Guia Roji 2005 (Edited by Fournier from http://www.guiaroji.com.mx (http://www.guiaroji.com.mx)

"We Do Not Fight for Victory, But for Reason"[4]

In recent years, several texts and images have shed light on the events of October 2, 1968. General Marcelino García Barragán, Secretary of Defense during Díaz Ordaz administration, left several military reports and other illuminating documents for the benefit of "history, which is written in long term" (Scherer and Monsiváis 2002:23 the translation is ours). In 1998, an important television network showed less than 10 min of a 24 h film record. The images were taken by several cameras set up around Plaza de las Tres Culturas by order of the Secretary of Government (Montemayor 1999:429; Gallegos 2000; Canal Seis de Julio 2002). Moreover, there are several photographs which survived the government attack on journalism. ***El Universal*** published them in 2002 (Almazán 2002a; Rodríguez Reyna 2002), as well as some striking pictures taken by a photographer who captured the horror experienced by students arrested at Chihuahua building (Gil Olmos 2001a; Martínez 2001a).

At present, there are new testimonies given by witnesses who finally broke silence and told what happened in Tlatelolco. It is possible to access declassified documents of the CIA, the FBI, the United States Department of Defense and the United States Embassy in Mexico (Doyle 2003). Millions of files of the former ***Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales*** (General Direction of Political and Social Investigations) and the ***Dirección Federal de Seguridad*** (Federal Direction of Security) are also available. Although most of these documents are mutilated, they provide relevant information on government repression in Tlatelolco (Scherer and Monsiváis 2004). These pieces of evidence are part and parcel of a complex puzzle. It is necessary to solve it to reconstruct Tlatelolco massacre. In this chapter, we use historical documents and other sources of information to present a canonical version of the events.

The demonstration was planned to go from Plaza de las Tres Culturas[5] to one of the main buildings of the ***Instituto Politécnico Nacional***, which was located relatively near Tlatelolco. Because of its height and privileged location in front of the plaza, the speakers chose the third floor balcony of Chihuahua building to give their speech (Fig. 10.5). However, when everything was ready, the speakers told the audience that the demonstration was going to be canceled. They were afraid of agitators who could incite violence and government repression. They proceeded to explain the political situation, and they had the intention of talking about the international support the movement had received (Álvarez Garín 2002:85).

Fig. 10.5

Panoramic view of Plaza de las Tres Culturas from Chihuahua building. ***Foreground***: pre-Columbian structures of the city of Tlatelolco and Santiago's church. ***Left***: 'Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores'. ***Center***: Plaza's esplanade, commemorative monument to the fallen on 2 October 1968. ***Background***: ISSSTE's building (Photo by Martínez Herrera, 2005)

On October 2, 1968, at 17:30, approximately 10,000 people (Gil Olmos 2001b:18) filled the plaza, standing up or sitting on the ground. The peaceful demonstration gathered men, women, children, elderly people, students, teachers, employees, journalists, railroad workers who supported the movement (Mendoza Gaytán 2004), and ordinary people such as "street vendors, housewives with babies in their arms, inhabitants of the residential unit, curious passers-by, typical onlookers, and many other people" (Poniatowska 1969:166).

Nobody knew why military troops, policemen and even army tanks arrived to Tlatelolco and posted around the plaza and the main access points (Montemayor 1999). Everything seems to point out that most of the officers were not aware of the historic role they were about to play. Their orders were to guarantee public security, "clear, with care, Plaza de las Tres Culturas of students" (Scherer and Monsiváis 2002:111), "repel the action of subversive groups in case of an armed conflict and avoid the killing of innocent people if possible" (Rodríguez and Lomas 2001:4).

Some days before, the High Command had planned an operation to stop the demonstration. Important decisions were made by Díaz Ordaz, the Commander-in-Chief, and probably the Secretary of Government Luis Echeverría Álvarez, who became President in 1970. As a matter of fact, Echeverría Álvarez represented Díaz Ordaz in the

presidential elections. Echeverría used his influence and relationships with the CIA to propel his career (Agee 1975). He also ensured the continuity of Díaz Ordaz's policy of control (Flores 2002; Petrich 2004).

At about 18:10, a helicopter dropped flares to indicate the beginning of the operation. Major State snipers were posted at several buildings, including Chihuahua, and the vaulted roof of the colonial church (Fig. 10.6). They did not wear uniforms. They opened fire on civilians and military officers as well. They even shot the General in charge of the soldiers when he was asking the people to disperse (Montemayor 1999:46; Álvarez Garín 2002:86). Snipers created confusion. Their main goal was to unleash military forces' violence while they were trying to repel the aggression supposedly coming from radical students. Light tanks of the ***Escuadrón Blindado*** (Armored Squadron) entered the plaza, firing their machine guns at the crowd. The ***Batallón de Fusileros Paracaidistas*** (Parachute Rifle Battalion) and the ***Batallón de Guardias Presidenciales*** (Presidential Guard Battalion) also participated in the events. Being caught in the crossfire, civilians tried to get to the church, which was transformed into an execution wall. They also tried to run to the nearest exit: a corridor between the plaza and Chihuahua building (Álvarez Garín 2002:86). Right there, they were caught by soldiers who slaughtered them with bayonets and guns. Men, women (some even pregnant) and children were injured and killed (García Hernández 1998; O'Donnell 2003). They were everywhere, bleeding and receiving no medical attention (Rodríguez 2002). Some shots reached people in their apartments. In only 10 min, the plaza became a mousehole and Chihuahua building, a mousetrap (Gil Olmos 2001b:18).

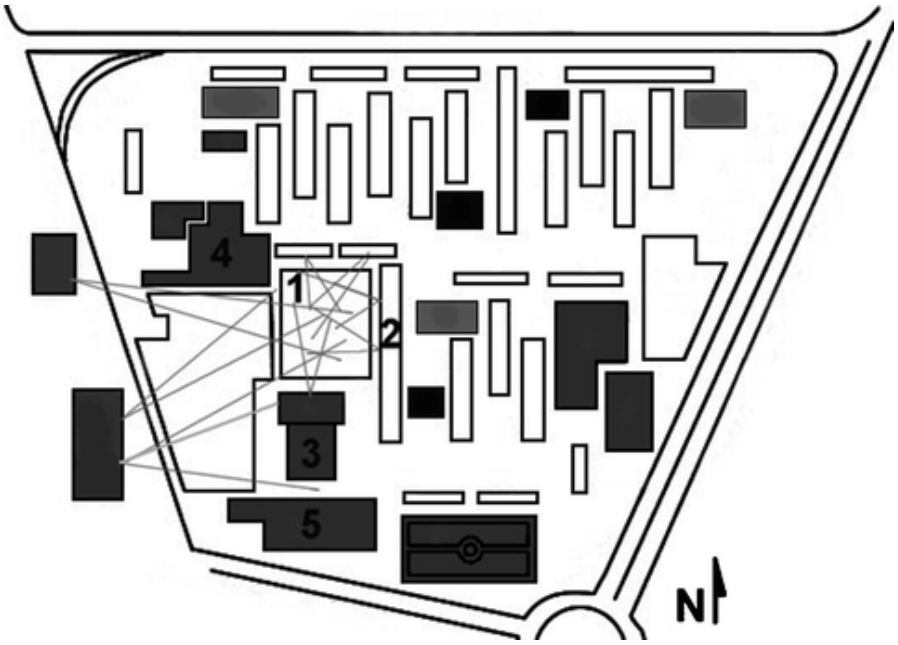

Fig. 10.6

Snipers position at several buildings surrounding Plaza de las Tres Culturas, and direction of the shots. 1. Plaza de las Tres Culturas, 2. Chihuahua building, 3. Santiago's Church, 4. 'Instituto Politécnico Nacional', 5. 'Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores' (Sketch by Patricia Fournier, 2005)

The members of the ***Batallón Olimpia*** (Olimpia Batallion),[6] who were part of the Presidential Guard, wore civilian clothes and a white glove or handkerchief on their left hand as a distinctive sign. These military agents carried out their orders: block Chihuahua building, arrest ***the members of the Consejo Nacional de Huelga***, take control of the second and the third floors, and shoot the crowd (Taibo 1998). Inside the labyrinthine building, people who sought refuge from the 90-min shooting were killed at point-blank range. Some of them were caught in the ground floor.

Outside Chihuahua building, the shooting became sporadic, but it was intensified around 23:00. At daybreak, dead bodies were piled up. Later, they were moved by unidetified vehicles (Alcántara 2002b; Castillo 2003). Firefighters showed up later and in the middle of the rain. They had to clean up the rivers of blood running through the plaza. The entire place was covered with clothes blackened by gunpowder or pierced with bayonets and bullets, shoes, pamphlets, pieces of skulls, fingers, among other things (Almazán 2002c; Rodríguez 2002).

The ***Batallón Olimpia*** broke into the surrounding buildings (including Chihuahua), where many students had sought refuge in the terrace floor or with some neighbors. These students were arrested, beaten up and forced to undress (Gil Olmos 2001a:12–13; Álvarez Garín 2002:88). Many young people who had been extrajudicially arrested were finally taken to army facilities (Almazán 2002b, c; Scherer and Monsiváis 2004:25).

"Violence is Against Us, but Not in Us"

Since daybreak, the relatives of the people who had disappeared at Tlatelolco tried to gather information on their whereabouts at hospitals (such as the Green or Red Cross Hospital Rubén Leñero), and judicial and forensic offices. In many cases, they did not succeed. Some of them were forced to accept death certificates stating that their relatives had died of natural causes to recover their bodies (Taibo 1998; Ramos Pérez 2002).

Some witnesses saw that the disfigured and damaged bodies of men, women, and children killed at Tlatelolco (Almazán 2002c) were at the ***Servicio Médico Forense*** (Forensic Medical Service) and the ***3º Delegación del Ministerio Público*** (3rd Office of the Public Department) (Fig. 10.7), among other places. Only a few dead bodies were taken there by ambulances or taxis. Most of them (especially those without ID cards) were taken by army trucks (Rodríguez Reyna 2002). In many cases, executors stripped the bodies and took their belongings. Even today, it is a mystery how many people died because of the injuries they received at Plaza de las Tres Culturas and what happened to their bodies.

Fig. 10.7

Young people murdered at Plaza de las Tres Culturas (taken from Álvarez Garín 2002:35)

Many activists who survived the massacre were persecuted. Some people were kidnapped; and hundreds of men and women were held captive at military facilities without an order of arrest. Later, most of them were sent to prison. Victims were subject to inhuman treatment and torture. They were forced to admit the official history of the events. Authorities planted evidence against them (Correa 2001:31; Álvarez Garín 2002:112–113), and they were summarily executed.

The media were forced to keep silent and the agents of the Government Department looted the written and graphic records of the event: “they were stealing history” (Almazán 2002c:14). Tlatelolco massacre was still taking place when the media communicated the official version of the events. According to it, the army had been attacked by students who acted as snipers; there was no choice but fighting the “terrorists” who attempted to overthrow Díaz Ordaz’s government (Álvarez Garín 2002:89). In this way, victimizers were transformed into victims.

The agents of the American government were informed of all the stages of the student movement before the massacre. At first, they thought that government reports describing the connection between foreign communist groups and Mexican students were true. After October 2, they found out that foreign activists or communist conspiracies had never existed. In confidential reports to Washington, American agents stated that the Tlatelolco incident was a sign of Díaz Ordaz’s clumsiness; that military agents did not carry out the orders correctly. They also added that students acting as snipers were responsible for the military counter-offensive (Doyle 2003).

In a political context close to martial law, massive demonstrations were forbidden as a means of denying "terrorists" the opportunity to threaten "public security." Although there were several demonstrations and meetings (some of them even headed by ***desaparecidos'*** mothers – Fig. 10.8), the student leaders were imprisoned and many activists run away to avoid arrest. Generalized fear destroyed the movement, but its political ideas survived and subsequently gave birth to other movements (Álvarez Garín 2002:199). All this happened in the presence of real state terrorism.

Fig. 10.8

October 1968 demonstration headed by desaparecidos' mothers (taken from Scherer and Monsiváis 2002:148)

It is estimated that more than 8,000 soldiers, ***granaderos***, Mexico DC police officers, secret, local and federal police agents, mounted policemen, members of the ***Batallón Olimpia***, firefighters, and 300 vehicles (tanks, light tanks, armored cars and jeeps with mounted machine guns) took part of the massacre. There were more than 700 people injured, and the death toll is still a matter of speculation. The number of students and

workers who were arrested climbed to 2,000. Some of them were finally released a couple of hours or days later. Most people were released in December, 1968. Meanwhile, more than 800 individuals remained in prison without trial until they were granted an amnesty in 1971 (Taibo 1998; Zarco 1998).

In September, 1969, Díaz Ordaz publically assumed responsibility for the events. As a matter of fact, it was part of the constitutional attributions of the president of the Republic. Some years later, he stressed that he was proud of having served the nation in 1968 (Canal Seis de Julio 2002). In short, state repressive forces ensured – to the sound of fanfares and before the eyes of foreigners – the development of the ironically called "Peace Olympic Games."

In the mid-1970s, a former CIA agent (Agee 1975) stated that the Mexican government smashed the movement and probably killed hundreds of people in October, 1968. He also said that similar events took place in other countries where people were trying to change the system.

"The Army's Duty is to Defend People, Not to Assault them"

In Mexico, the social and cultural dimensions of repression invest it with meaning and power. According to the national law, the state is entitled to manipulate the dichotomy of violence (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2005:1–2). In this way, violence unleashed by the government was legitimate. Meanwhile, the student movement was declared illegitimate on the basis of false evidence.[7] The members of the movement were forced to sign sworn statements, accepting the charges of rebellion, criminal association, sedition, property damage, robbery, plundering, attack and murder of authority agents (Martínez 2003).

Based on these statements, the intervention of the military forces seemed to be reasonable. Furthermore, agitators deserved to be punished for their actions. The very construction of an official historical narrative was an act of violence. Repressive states control social memory to eradicate moral indignation. Thus, historical memory is erased; protests are labeled as "subversive"; and death tolls are manipulated. Forced amnesia is a repressive instrument of the state (Monsiváis 2001:21–22).

According to international law, forced disappearance is a crime against humanity. In democratic political systems (even in the case of "supposedly" democratic governments, such as Mexico for more than 70 years), state crimes should be understood as state terrorism. State terrorism encourages impunity, as it hinders political investigations to prosecute people responsible for genocides such as the Tlatelolco massacre (Martínez 2001b:29, 31).

International treaties signed by Mexico define genocide as any act committed with the intent to annihilate – in whole or in part – national, ethnic, racial or religious groups. Genocide involves murder, physical and mental damage, and inhumane living conditions (United Nations 1951).

Furthermore, we should remember that the ***desaparecidos*** are not dead, but missing people: "A forced disappearance involves the deprivation of a person's liberty, in whatever form or for whatever reason, brought about by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by an absence of information, or refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or information, or concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person. As a consequence, the exercise of legal rights and pertinent procedural guarantees is impeded" (Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos 1994).

Forced disappearance in Latin America dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century, but it increased in the 1960s. The logic of this procedure (if there is one) is that victims should disappear in order hide victimizers and their crimes. This repressive policy was frequently adopted by military dictatorships, even though in some cases (such as Mexico, Colombia and Peru) it was also adopted by "democratic" governments (Molina Theissen 1998).

In the case of Mexico, the disguised dictatorship of the ***Partido Revolucionario Institucional*** and the power of the state (including rural and working stations) increased social subjugation. In this context, disappearance went unpunished until today. In December, 2000, Vicente Fox (representing the ***Partido Acción Nacional*** – National Action Party) won the elections. Based on his promises, people expected a true democratic "change" in the country. Mexicans, and especially ***desaparecidos'*** relatives and friends, were full of hope. The creation of the ***Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado*** (Special Prosecution Service for Past Social and Political Movements) seemed to meet their demands with transparency. But progress has been limited and impunity persists. Past (and even present) cases of forced disappearance and extrajudicial executions still go unpunished (Avilés Allende 2002; Correa 2001; Granma 2004; Amnistía Internacional Sección Mexicana 2005; Castillo 2005; Sullivan 2005).

People who disappeared during the 1968 student movement might be described as people deprived of freedom by state agents (or in any case, other agents authorized by the state). As a consequence, they cannot be considered dead. Some relatives still demand their "appearance with life." The Comité Eureka's8 slogan (Eureka Comitte slogan) says: "They took them alive; we want them back alive" (Herrera and Castillo 2003:7, the translation is ours). Some people claim: "We will not decide whether they are dead or not. That sort of thing cannot be decided. They have disappeared. That is precisely what the government expects from us: to accept the worst, without talking about it or taking any responsibility; to forget; to believe this is a past issue instead of a painful, current one" (HIJOS-México 2005:62, the translation is ours).

It is necessary to reveal the whereabouts of people shot at Plaza de las Tres Culturas, as well as those of individuals who remain disappeared (some of whom were murdered). For this reason, we believe it is necessary to develop a forensic project to shed light on state terrorism.

"They Carried no Weapons, But Their Own Blood"

Several documentary sources state that in the early morning of October 3, soldiers piled up bodies at Plaza de las Tres Culturas (Alcántara 2002b). A General said that he had seen 38 dead civilians lying on the esplanade of the plaza, 4 dead soldiers at the same place, and a dead boy at Chihuahua building (Corona del Rosal 1995). Some demonstrators managed to survive, covering themselves with dead bodies. That was the case of a young South American man, who covered himself with the bodies of an elderly man and a woman – only two of the hundreds of dead people he saw at the plaza (Anonymous 1968:16). The testimony of a former pilot of the parastatal company ***Petróleos Mexicanos*** (Mexican Oil) revealed that some bodies were thrown into the ocean. This testimony bears similarities to other documents gathered by the Commission of Truth in the 1990s. These documents stated that military airplanes threw bodies into the Gulf of Mexico (Taibo 1998).

Some people told what happened at different hospitals. Hospitals received lots of patients, some of them injured to death. A photographer particularly "remembers a young man… who was lying down at one of the hospital halls: a bullet had perforated his stomach. The young man said to the photographer: 'I'm from Sinaola University'. 'Do you want me to call somebody in particular?' 'No, they are going to get mad, they are going to get mad'. 'Some time later, when I returned to take some photographs, the boy was still on the floor, but he was dead'" (Almazán 2002c:A15, the translation is ours). The use of brutal force was reported by the doctors who took care of the patients. The doctors from the Green Cross Hospital Leñero remember "…they arrived covered in blood, without hands, shot" (Aguirre 2002:A12, the translation is ours).

The assistants of the ***Servicio Médico Forense*** witnessed the killing. All the bodies "had something in common: they showed the skillful use of bayonets and expansive bullet shots. They knew where they had to attack. The arms, legs and feet were not injured. The injuries affected the heart and other vital organs." The situation was shocking: "Dead bodies had their chests crushed," and their "skulls were destroyed by short and blunt objects." "Brutal traumatism" was frequently evident. Doctors' testimonies describe things like this: "an expansive bullet injury in the head," "injuries directly affecting the heart," people who "had lost lots of blood through the stomach." Without a doubt, "these were army's bullets. In battle, the soldier has only one purpose: destroy, kill…" (Rodríguez Reyna 2002:A14–A15, the translation is ours).

Repression and cruelty also took place at the hospitals. Although doctors and nurses tried to do their job, "granaderos and secret [police officers] came to the hospitals, and took the boys away from the operating theaters. Nobody knows where these boys ended up, or if they died" (Taibo 1998:11, the translation is ours). Some witnesses said that in the ***3° Delegación del Ministerio Público*** there were more than 40 dead people between 18 and 20 years old (Canal Seis de Julio 2002). Their whereabouts remain unknown. Nevertheless, some neighbors stated that some days later the area "smelt like burning meat, as if -it was said- they were burning young people in ovens" (Almazán 2002b:A12, the translation is ours).

After being deprived of their personal belongings and ID cards,9 many of the bodies at the Servicio Médico Forense disappeared at the hands of the army: "Military officers got in. They came to talk to the director. Military officers went down and up… The facilities were controlled by military forces. They were in charge. They got into the amphitheater; they were there… In the afternoon, military vehicles came to take the bodies without identification. The order was to take them away…" (Rodríguez 2002 A10, the translation is ours).

Where did they take the bodies to? What did they do to them? To answer these questions, it is necessary to consider several testimonies. These documentary sources state that some of the bodies could have been burnt or buried in military facilities (for instance, Campo Marte, Campo Militar No 1, Panteón Civil de Dolores – near Campo Militar No 1) or the slope of an extinct volcano near Mexico DC. Before the massacre and in the midst of repression, when "a foreign journalist asked if some of the students who were said to have died had been identified, the [strike] committee said that, on the one hand, 'it does not suit the government to return the bodies'; and on the other, 'we have news that the bodies were burnt in Campo de Marte'" (Ramírez 1998a:202, the translation is ours).

Furthermore, some activists knew that several bodies were taken to Campo Militar No 1 in military vehicles and tanks. They were burnt, although some individuals were still alive. It was possible to "hear their wail [coming out from the vehicles], and that was the way they were burnt… it was Mexican soldiers' idea" (Alcántara 2002a:A13, the translation is ours). Taking these shocking testimonies as a whole, it is suspicious that the High Command does not accept that the bodies were burnt in military areas and Campo Militar No 1: "Some people said 5,000 bodies were burnt there. It comes to my mind that it takes three hours to burn a single body and that, in the first place, there are no incinerators [in the military area]. In the second place, and this is the most important thing, where are the five thousand mothers [who look for their dead sons and daughters]? Because some people said that was the death toll at Tlatelolco… that they would fight like the mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. If somebody is guilty, then charge him/her" (Garduño and Pérez 2001:13, the translation is ours).

Luis Echeverría Álvarez, the Secretary of Government in 1968, apparently played an active role in Tlatelolco massacre. When he became president, he launched another repressive operation on June 10, 1971. At that moment, a peaceful student demonstration was attacked by the "Halcones," a paramilitary group under the direct orders of the government. In this case, the unofficial death toll climbed to 125 (Ramírez Cuevas 2003). There is evidence that the president gave telephone instructions on what to do with the prisoners and the bodies.

Probably taking into account his experience in Tlatelolco, Echeverría emphatically said: "Injured people? Take them to Campo Militar. Do not allow photographs… One of us is injured or dead? Take him to Campo Militar. More confrontations, many dead bodies? Take them all to Campo Militar. Green Cross? No, no. Do not allow photographs. 'Burn them'… Burn the bodies. Nobody should be left out. Do not allow photographs" (Scherer and Monsiváis 2004:52–53, the translation is ours).

Although this reference is not directly connected to Tlatelolco massacre, it is possible to point out that burning opponents' dead bodies was a practice already known and used by the government. If osteological remains were destroyed by fire, then forensic researchers will face enormous difficulties in their investigations.

One military area stands out among the others. It is frequently mentioned by the army10 (Rodríguez and Lomas 2001) and the people who were imprisoned in October, 1968. One of our informants was arrested 2 weeks before the bloody event. He was not associated with the demonstration in Tlatelolco, but he was connected to leftist organizations since he was young. He was physically tortured, imprisoned and placed in solitary confinement in a big gallery located at the basement of Campo Militar No 1. He said that the worst torture was not talking to anyone. This situation almost drove him mad. Silence was finally broken by a soldier who tried to obtain information about the student movement. This soldier told him his superiors had punished him for talking. For that reason, he was not allowed to go to Tlatelolco despite his "desire to kill students." In the early morning of October 3, hundreds of demonstrators were imprisoned in the same gallery. Some of them had been beaten up. Some days later, the informant and other prisoners were released. He was forced to wear a military uniform. To his surprise, he found his name in the list of people who had disappeared or died on October 2. His partners told him it would be wise not to inform the military and police forces he was alive.

A ***Consejo Nacional de Huelga's*** activist who was imprisoned in Campo Militar No 1 until January, 1969, was never seen again. This is a case of forced disappearance associated with military repression (Castillo and Méndez 2005).

These testimonies complement others, pointing out that some people who were arrested in Tlatelolco were extrajudicially executed by their captors: "They fed us pretty well. But we heard shots at night. Some of the guards said that they were forming a firing squad, that they were killing people… In Campo Militar No 1 they took us to some galleries, with metallic beds. They woke us up at midnight, and they told us they were going to shoot us. There were railroad workers, bank clerks and students. They beat me up. They used psychological torture too. They took people out, we heard shots and trembled with fear. I never saw them coming back" (Gil Olmos 2001a:14, the translation is ours).

Some time ago, one of the members of the 1968 student movement told his partners that gravediggers at Panteón Civil de Dolores knew that some people killed at Tlatelolco were clandestinely buried under legally registered graves. Gravediggers told him where these burials were located. Nevertheless, the exact information was lost when the informant died. For this reason, we do not know the location of the graves.

Furthermore, a well-known political cartoonist confessed that he was kidnapped at the beginning of 1969 (Sánchez González 2004). He was about to be executed by DFP agents, who finally told him that "at a certain place at Nevado de Toluca, there were some trees marked with crosses. Some people who had disappeared in 1968 were buried under those trees" (Aranda 2002:14, the translation is ours).

According to documentary sources and testimonies, it is possible to believe that human remains can be found at Campo Militar No 1, Panteón Civil de Dolores, and Nevado de Toluca. These remains probably belong to people killed at Tlatelolco, or people arrested there and executed somewhere else.

We wonder how many people we are talking about. The government created the official history of Tlatelolco. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate how many people died between October 2 and 3, 1968; between July and October, in confrontations between military forces and students; and between October and the beginning of 1969. In the mid-1970s, former president Díaz Ordaz tried to fight any attempt to shed light on the death toll: "… they said there were hundreds of people dead. Unfortunately, there were some, but not hundreds. As far as I know, there were more than 30, but less than 40, including soldiers, activists and onlookers. Some people will say it is easy to hide and reduce [the real death toll]. But I challenge anyone who values his/her own opinion to provide some evidence, even though it is not direct or conclusive. A list containing the names would be enough. Some might say, as they have said on several occasions, that the bodies disa… that someone made the bodies disappear, that they were hidden in clandes… that they were clandestinely buried, that they were burnt, that is easy; it is not easy to do it with impunity, but it is easy to do it…" (Canal Seis de Julio 2002, the translation is ours).

The words "As far as I know, there were more than 30, but less than 40" are certainly amazing for their arrogance and insolence. They seem to point out that the difference between one number and the other does not really matter. In the early morning of October 3, 1968, the official death toll was established by government agents who broke into newspapers' editorial offices, destroying evidence and taking all the photographs away. "The photographs, bastard, the photographs! … Only 33 dead people, 33! What? That is the official death toll! … These are government's orders, Echeverrías' orders! It is a presidential order! Díaz Ordaz wants to hide everything! Hide everything" (Almazán 2002c:A14, the translation is ours).

From that moment on, and for several decades, that was the official death toll. But survivors and witnesses started to talk. They said they had seen dead people at Chihuahua building: "…[They] were piled up at the exit. A soldier told me not to turn around, but I managed to see the bodies, one on top of the other, out of the corner of my eye; they were half-naked" (Gil Olmos 2001a:13, the translation is ours).

A father, who was desperately looking for his son, said he had seen 121 dead victims (Jardón 2003:38). Meanwhile, "… people started to gather [at the Servicio Médico Forense], looking for their relatives. There were long rows of hearses all morning. I saw more than 500 bodies, all of them shot" (Almazán 2002c:A14, the translation is ours). A soldier proudly told a foreign student who was imprisoned at Campo Militar No 1 that military forces had killed "500 communists like you" (Anonymous 1968:16). The ***Consejo Nacional de Huelga's*** activists have recently stated that 635 students were killed at Plaza de las Tres Culturas (Alcántara 2002a). Agee, a CIA detractor, remembers that at the Embassy of the United States it was rumored that 82 people had been shot, although they could have been hundreds or more than 1,000 (Rocha 2002). The absence of formal complaints was a result of threats against witnesses, survivors, relatives and friends. "…

In the days, weeks, and years following Tlatelolco massacre it was usual to listen to victims' relatives saying: 'In spite of our grief, they threaten us with death'. Many of them… finished their search for justice; others, organized or not, still go on" (Alcántara 2002a:A13, the translation is ours).

We are forced to return to our previous question: how many people died in Tlatelolco? This question has not been adequately answered yet. DFS showed many contradictions, but it finally put the death toll at 30. On October 4, 1968, the official report stated that 26 people were dead, including 4 women and a soldier. On January 31, 1969, the report stated that there were 26 dead civilians, 2 military officers, and a boy whose name appeared in the lists of dead and injured people (Jardón 2003:38). On October 6, 1968, the ***Consejo Nacional de Huelga's*** members stressed that, up to that moment, they knew that 100 people had died as a result of the massacre. However, they recognized that the death toll was still rising (Ramírez 1998b:410). Outside Mexico, journalists mentioned up to 325 dead people (including 130 students – Jardón 2003:40). A cameraman made a similar calculation, considering the number of trucks carrying bodies from Plaza de las Tres Culturas (Caballero 2003). Furthermore, it is important to take note of the declassified documents of the American intelligence services. There is a confidential report which states: "…as usual in Mexico, it is impossible to find death toll statistics of the battle of October 2. The reports we have received mention up to 350 dead people. The best estimation of the embassy indicates that this number ranges from 150 to 200" (Defense Intelligence Agency 1968:9 National Archives, RG 59, 1967–1969).

Several testimonies go far beyond the government's version of the events. These testimonies state that probably 500 people lost their lives in the violent events of October 2. We should take into account an indefinite number of people executed at Campo Militar No 1, as well as 200 bodies reported at the end of July (Menéndez Rodríguez 1968a). We do not know where they are, although it is possible that some of them were burnt. Therefore, it is necessary to shed light on the fate of about 700 people who died at the hands of the government in a series of violent events which began in July, 1968.

"United We Will Win!"

Leaving aside the particularities of forensic sciences and heuristic models of investigation, the participation of different disciplines in the analysis of violent events is determined by national legal systems which limit, deny or encourage their collaboration (Stewart 1979; Boddington et al. 1987; Joyce and Stover 1991; Rodríguez 1994; Hunter et al. 1996; Cox 2001; Crist 2001; Doretti and Snow 2003; Sanford 2003; Skinner et al. 2003). In the case of Mexico, archaeology falls within the scope of the state. Heritage legislation establishes that archaeologists are the only people allowed to conduct investigations on past material remains. Prehistoric, pre-Hispanic and historical remains (until the end of the nineteenth century) are property of the nation. They include portable and nonportable cultural goods, as well as human remains. Physical anthropologists can participate in the recovery of human remains, as long as the recovery projects are supervised by archaeologists. Archaeological field surveys, excavations, analyses, projects and reports are overseen by the ***Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia*** (National Institute of Anthropology and History). The state can use this federal

organization to prevent specific studies from being conducted. Scientific interventions in twentieth-century contexts are excluded from this legal framework. Therefore, forensic archaeology is not included in the same research strategy as historical archaeology (Cox 2001; Crist 2001).

Forensic anthropology is caught in a legal limbo too. Physical anthropologists can take part in forensic studies (mainly, in laboratory analyses). Nevertheless, they are subject to the guidelines of the ***Servicio Médico Forense*** and the ***Procuraduría General de Justicia*** (Attorney General's Office). These organizations state that forensic surgeons must provide expert reports that will be approved by the ***Ministerio Público*** (Public Prosecutor's Office) and special legal authorities in criminal proceedings. On certain occasions, physical anthropologists are authorized by the Supreme Court of Justice to act as external experts. This is one of the ways in which archaeologists and physical anthropologists can participate in the investigation of Tlatelolco massacre.

For this reason, it would be necessary to create an interdisciplinary project of investigation including archaeologists, physical anthropologists, criminal lawyers, physicians, historians, sociologists, economists, and experts in national and international law, crimes against humanity and human rights violations. The theoretical object and the practical consequences of the project should focus on the explanation of state crimes and the whereabouts of ***desaparecidos***. These experts can be found in Mexico. They were trained in this country or they completed their studies abroad. The only thing that is missing is the political decision to encourage the scientific analysis of Tlatelolco massacre and its aftermath.

This kind of research would need an academic and social project to recover historical memory, including experts, survivors and victims' relatives. Studies should try to shed light on violent events and its causes, analyzing the history of the student movement and reconstructing its historical, political, social, economic and military context. Researchers should intend to identify the acts and actors of violence and state terrorism. They also should attempt to find dead and disappeared people (United Nations 1991; Etxeberria 2004), and gather evidence to prosecute the crimes.

Some aspects of this project are extremely difficult to achieve, as long as the state has destroyed or concealed significant pieces of information – such as the lists of victims. Furthermore, several victims' relatives and friends were silenced by the government (Castillo 2004:7). Although some testimonies provided information on the location of the burials (Campo Militar No 1, Panteón Civil de Dolores and Nevado de Toluca, among others), it was impossible to conduct archaeological investigations there. Most of these places are military areas, rendering it difficult to prove the existence of clandestine burials.

This kind of research needs to consider two different issues. On the one hand, it has to gather information from government employees, ranging from the president – that is to say, the commander-in-chief of the army forces and the person in charge of the implementation of national policies – to federal, local, judicial and military authorities.

On the other hand, it has to gather information from people “on the other side” – in this case, survivors and executioners – to reconstruct the events and learn more about the people involved in violence and repression.

The work of forensic anthropologists and archaeologists needs to focus on the recovery of the remains of people killed at Plaza de las Tres Culturas, or people arrested and killed in secret locations. Forensic analyses should follow five basic stages and a complementary one:

1. 1.

   Historical studies: Collection of documentary sources (written, visual and audible).

2. 2.

   Analysis of testimonies: Collection and analysis of oral information provided by direct or indirect witnesses, preserving their anonymity if necessary.

3. 3.

   Legal work: Filing of formal complaints and permission requests to conduct fieldwork (archaeological surveys and exhumations of human remains).

4. 4.

   Archaeological studies: Geophysical surveys and stratigraphic excavations; determination of cultural and natural formation processes (Schiffer 1987); detailed recovery and description of material remains; reconstruction of anatomical positions; artefactual analysis.

5. 5.

   Anthropological analyses: In situ recovery of osteological remains; laboratory analyses to identify people and determine their cause of death (osteological, dental, genetic and chemical analyses, among others).

6. 6.

   Psychological support: Mental health treatments and psychological help to victims’ relatives.

The results of the anthropological and archaeological work should be included in technical reports, describing the activities conducted and the information gathered by researchers (for instance, testimonies and personal records of the victims). It should be relevant to explain the methodologies used to identify the individuals.11 Based on these technical accounts, lawyers could prosecute people responsible for criminal acts.

"The Color of Blood is Never Forgotten"

In Mexico, the past (especially, bloody historical events) is embedded in social struggles, the social imaginary and the present. The memory of violence against people who fought for political openness is continually reproduced and preserved. The state tries to silence social protests through terror and assassination. Some people still enjoy the privileges of a corrupt regime (Reding 1995). In spite of the claims for justice, political assassination, forced disappearance, torture and genocide go unpunished.12

Since 2001, the government has supposedly granted open access to information. Nevertheless, the ability to know the true causes of past tragic events is limited, as the only documentary sources open to public opinion are mutilated and other pieces of evidence are hidden in secret state files (Scherer and Monsiváis 2002, 2004). Some organizations like Amnesty International point out that illegal detentions, torture, human rights violations and forced disappearance (Amnistía Internacional 2001, 2002) mainly affect those who question the status quo in urban and rural areas. In the case of Tlatelolco, impunity finally prevailed as low-ranked executioners were silenced, and witnesses were threatened or even killed (Maza 1988). Another way criminals found to evade justice was by reinforcing an ambiguous legal framework which released them from their responsibility because of the time elapsed since the tragic events. This was an efficient device to hide the crimes against humanity that define the Mexican political system year after year, and administration after administration.

People guilty of political crimes must be identified. As the members of HIJOS-Mexico (2005) point out the only and possible public apology for those who grew up surrounded by absence and the rejection of death is to find the whereabouts of their relatives and friends (since the beginning of the Dirty War in 1968 to the end of the 1980s) despite the complicity of the legal system.13

Although social demands do not always have legal responses, memory still faces oblivion. Nowadays, survivors and victims' relatives demand the establishment of a Truth Commission. They do not want it to be a mockery of justice like the 1993 Commission. It is necessary to know the truth (Garrido 1998; Martínez 2004). The sociopolitical Mexican system – which claims to have adopted an open-door policy – should recover victims' remains. We wonder if the truth will be hidden once again to protect people responsible for crimes against humanity.

Our proposal would contribute to shed light on repressive events, even though it would be a first approach to the subject. The construction of this model should be based on documentary evidence. Given the apropriate sociopolitical conditions, it would be possible to develop specific research projects in Mexico. This model requires an interdisciplinary approach. Forensic archaeology and anthropology would hold an important place within this project. Therefore, our proposal could provide new evidence to satisfy the need for justice – in particular, in the case of crimes against humanity (such as the massacre of October 2, 1968). Nongovernment organizations should coordinate this kind of interdisciplinary research project. The government could also appoint experts from academic institutions, but it should not intimidate them. Any "truth commission" dependent on the government would obtain partial and biased results like the ones obtained in the past.

Summing up, this kind of research should satisfy social needs and demands, leaving scientific interests behind. Scientists cannot observe historical subjects under the microscope, as if they were part of depositional contexts or osteological remains analyzed in the laboratory. When we talk about social analysis, hard science is completely useless and futile. We should take into account a human perspective and people's needs to investigate the historical events surrounding the 1968 student movement. The social, ethical and professional aspects of the research are more than relevant, as they are closely connected to a historical, political, and social process which silenced the country for 40 years. The Tlatelolco massacre had serious consequences for Mexico, shaping the historical development of the country. It is an open wound for all of us. Therefore, experts need to acknowledge the social purpose of their work, and their commitment to survivors, victims' relatives and Mexican people in general.

An archaeology of the contemporary world would have the potential to recover historical memory through the analysis of material culture. Following the heuristic model of historical archaeology, it could use documentary evidence to conduct fruitful interdisciplinary investigations. We still have to determine to what extent Mexican archeologists would commit to modern society and the study of recent massacres, exceeding the legal role that the government has traditionally assigned them – that is to say, the protection, preservation, diffusion and analysis of the cultural heritage.

Although the government has frequently used oblivion with the aim of strengthening impunity, the killing of Tlatelolco has not disappeared from collective memory.14 On the contrary, it was used by different groups showing specific interests and needs to construct their "relative identities."15 Some people state that memory is a political obligation (Scherer and Monsiváis 2002:34). From this perspective, it is necessary to establish different political positions and take power. Some other people believe that memory is connected to past rebelliousness, which is present in visionary struggles (González Souza 1998). The people who took part in the 1968 student movement still go to Plaza de las Tres Culturas every anniversary of the massacre to protest against past and present injustice. Many Mexican citizens feel indignation at the killing; others wait for justice and punishment; some others have limited access to information. Nevertheless, all of them reproduce discourses and narratives that perpetuate the memory of state terrorism.

As we walked along Plaza de las Tres Culturas, where we took some of the photographs shown in this chapter, we saw three kids (less than 12 years old) who made a stop at a monument commemorating the fallen on October 2: the stele of Tlatelolco (Fig. 10.9). One of the kids asked the others: "Hey, what is this?"; the only girl in the group gave a clear and quick answer which she did not learn in school textbooks: "The thing is that many students were killed here for protesting against bad things the government does to people."

Fig. 10.9

Commemorative monument to the fallen at Plaza de las Tres Culturas on October 2, 1968. It was erected on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the killing (Photo by Martínez Herrera, 2005)

The 1968 massacre is still present in the collective imagination, the social memory, the oral tradition, the written chronicles and survivors' testimonies. The need to shed light on the tragic night at Tlatelolco and other criminal acts of state terrorism is clearly summarized in the slogan created in the first anniversary of the killing (Pérez Arce 1998), a slogan which is valid among people who fight for a democratic Mexico: October 2 must not be forgotten!

Footnotes

1. 1.

   This phrase – which is still in use today – was coined in the nineteenth century, after the war between Mexico and the United States. It particularly refers to the feelings of despair created by American domination.

2. 2.

   The crime of "social dissolution" was established by the Federal Legal Code in times of war. It allowed the government to act against people who were suspected of being dangerous. As a consequence, people with "leftist tendencies" could be arrested with a total lack of consideration.

3. 3.

   The government accused the students of creating chaos during the Olympic Games, attempting to overthrow the Bourgeois State, creating a focus of resistance and urban guerrilla, accusing Díaz Ordaz of being a puppet of the Yankee imperialism, embracing the ideals of the Cuban Revolution, fighting with workers for socialism, conducting terrorist acts against public buildings, adopting Marxist-Leninist ideas with the aim of making the government collapse (Corona del Rosal 1995).

4. 4.

   This and the subsequent subheadings are slogans of the 1968 movement.

5. 5.

   "The plaza … is a flagstone rectangle raised 2 or 3 meters off the ground. It is surrounded by the ruins of Tlatelolco on the west; Santiago's Church and – behind it – the 'Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores' [Department of Foreign Affairs] on the south; the Escuela Vocacional Número 7' [Vocational School No 7] of the IPN ['Instituto Politécnico Nacional'] and some apartment buildings on the north; and Chihuahua building on the east. The main access points are two narrow corridors and a central 20-meter-wide staircase. The slope is lower on the north side and might be easily climbed" (Álvarez Garín 2002:86, the translation is ours).

6. 6.

   "The 'Batallón Olimpia' was created in February, 1968, with the aim of watching the buildings of the Olympic Games and carrying out certain orders. It depended directly on the Joint Chief of Staff and, in consequence, on the president of the republic. It was made up of agents from different battalions all over the country, and it had an extraordinary number of noncommissioned officers… On October 2, it was increased by the addition of two cavalry units" (Taibo 1998:10, the translation is ours).

7. 7.

   According to the government, the aim of the student movement was to "overthrow the constituted government of the Mexican Republic and replace it by a communist regime of workers, students, and peasants" (Castillo et al. 2002:48).

Notes

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