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Memory and History of Mexico '68

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Abstract:

The student movement Mexico '68 (Sesenta-y-ocho) that was active between July and December of 1968 has come to be seen as one of the most important events of the second half of the twentieth century in Mexico, in both public memory and national history. However as this was not always the case, the aim of this article is to analyse the transformations and permanencies in the many accounts that have formed over the last four decades concerning the Mexican summer of 1968, giving attention to four types of narrative: public debates, the specialized historiography on the student movement, books dealing with national history, and the official history. This analysis is intended to show how the 'historical centrality' of 1968 was progressively formed in the national public space and in historiographic discourse. Keywords: Mexico '68, Sesenta-y-ocho, collective memory, history, student movement, political repression, sites of memory.

Resumen: Memorias e historias de México 68

El movimiento estudiantil de México 68 (Sesenta-y-ocho) que tuvo lugar entre julio y diciembre de 1968 se considera como uno de los acontecimientos más importantes de México en la segunda mitad del siglo XX, tanto desde la memoria pública como desde la historiografía nacional. Sin embargo, como esto no siempre fue así, el objetivo del artículo es analizar las transformaciones y permanencias en las múltiples narraciones que se han creado a lo largo de las últimas cuatro décadas acerca del verano mexicano del 68, dando preeminencia a cuatro narrativas: los debates públicos, la historiografía especializada sobre el movimiento estudiantil, los libros abocados a la historia nacional y la historia oficial. Este análisis busca mostrar cómo se fue conformando la 'centralidad histórica' del 68 en el espacio público nacional y en los discursos historiográficos. Palabras clave: México 68, Sesenta-y-ocho, memoria colectiva, historia, movimiento estudiantil, represión política, lugares de memoria.

Over the summer of 1968 an unprecedented student protest known as Mexico '68 or *Sesenta-y-Ocho* formed in Mexico against the authoritarian government of President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI – Institutional Revolutionary Party). One of the main actors of protest was the Consejo Nacional de Huelga (CNH – National Strike Council), which in-

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cluded the representatives from institutions of public and private higher education that were taking part in the movement. The students' central demands were in compliance with the Constitution, calling for an end to government repression and punishment of those who had been responsible for it, indemnification of the families of dead and injured, release of political prisoners, and a space for public dialogue (Ramírez, 1969). For over two months, students roamed the city obtaining the support of such social sectors as housewives, workers, neighbourhood groups, and young professionals (see Semo, 1989). They used ingenious methods such as brigades, flash rallies, and fliers to counter the intense campaign the government was waging against the students. This campaign, derived from Cold War tactics, was supported by the business community, the media, the anti-communist right, and the high clergy (Del Castillo, 2012). A critical point in the movement occurred on 2 October when a student rally taking place at Tlatelolco in the afternoon was ferociously repressed (Montemayor, 2000; Aguayo, 1998). Even as of today there are no definite figures for the casualties. The official figure given by the government claimed 30 dead. In 1969 the CNH reported a figure of around 150, and the US Embassy gave an estimate of between 150 and 200 (FEMOSPP, 2006).

Since then, the events of 1968 have gone through a transformation in late twentieth-century Mexico to become 'the myth of the struggle for democracy' for both the left and the right. In fact, Enrique Florescano commissioned Gilberto Guevara Niebla, one of the leaders of the CNH, to write a text about the Sesenta-v-ocho movement for Mitos mexicanos:

... The Movement is remembered with emotion, as something unique, a body made up of deeds, without contradictions; large elements are evoked while the details are omitted; one speaks of its virtues, never of its defects.... (Guevara Niebla, 1995, p. 81).

One aspect that needs to be underlined is that memories linked to the Sesenta*v-ocho* movement contain a strong political component which has tended to displace the cultural aspect mentioned by historiographers (Zolov, 1998). In this sense the events of 1968 in Mexico have been remembered in a different way from the student movements of other countries. For example, in France the student movement was denigrated politically but salvaged culturally (see Rioux, 2008; Ross, 2008). As will be shown, the events of 1968 have, over several decades, acquired a singular place in both public memories and national history. Thus the aim of this article is to inquire into the content of narratives of those events, and specifically, who said what and when about the movement, as well as to historicize its increasing acceptance as one of the principal events of twentieth-century Mexico.

The various narratives to be taken into account are, firstly, the debates generated by the events of 1968 in the public space (understanding these as 'public memories');1 secondly, the various writings given by eye-witness accounts, fiction, academic research books and papers, and essays on the events (understanding these as the historiography on the Sesenta-v-ocho movement);² thirdly, the academic narratives that have given it a space in 'national history'. 3 and finally, its inclusion in the 'official history' (the textbooks provided free of charge to school children, its museological treatment, and the parliamentary decrees referring to the event).4

Denunciation of government repression vs. stigmatization of the students, 1969-1977

President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz's own words spoken in 1968 supporting the memory of the conspiracy were to establish the tone maintained over the following years by politicians close to the regime.⁵ The perception typified the students as 'juvenile delinquents' as well as 'members of a communist conspiracy'. This representation of 'conspiracy' was also disseminated by men loyal to the government. Jiménez (2011) has proposed that the years 1968-1975 constitute a first phase in narratives on 1968, in which essays, newspaper reports, and even novels articulated a discourse echoing the government's own discourse, disqualifying the student movement. Representatives of this period would be, among others, ¡El móndrigo! Bitácora del Consejo Nacional de Huelga (1969) and La Plaza by Luis Spota (1972).

¡El móndrigo! in its third edition describes itself as the testimony and diary found under the lifeless body of an unidentified student participating in the movement in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas on 2 October – typewritten notes whose very last pages were handwritten in the heat of the events in Tlatelolco. This publication by an anonymous author and without editorial data was prepared with materials from the Dirección Federal de Seguridad (Federal Security Bureau), and is in fact the best known of the texts prepared by the government. In the book the student movement is denigrated (Martré, 1986). The 'conspiracy' that the government intended to expose is perhaps best observed in the preface (supposedly written by the publishing house): 'There are days where he [the student] exudes optimism and believes he has the power already in hand, which is his obsession, in order to establish the socialist regime' (*¡El* móndrigo!, 1969, p. 6). Thus, through the anonymous pages of a testimony by a young student supposedly involved in the facts, the government gave its own view of the student movement and of the 'international communist conspiracy'. Aware that it was being questioned by large sectors of the population, it was a vain attempt on the part of the government to convince those sectors that the position of the State had been the correct one.

The government view began to change in 1970 with the succeeding president, Luis Echeverría Álvarez (PRI), minister of Interior in 1968, who sought to cut his links with Díaz Ordaz, particularly as regarded responsibility for the repression exercised in 1968.7 With this in mind, he commenced a series of reforms under the heading of 'democratic opening': releasing student leaders and other political prisoners; initiating a dialogue with the country's students; and, finally, derogating the polemical Article 145 and 145 bis (Zermeño, 1978).8

At the other end of the political spectrum, between 1969 and 1977, the communications media reported on actions held yearly to commemorate the massacre at Tlatelolco on 2 October 1968, describing it as a 'massacre', 'crime', 'tragedy of Tlatelolco', 'one of the darkest episodes in the history of Mexico'. Although marches took place for the first time in several cities in 1972 (Excélsior, 1972, October 3, p. 1), it was only in 1977 that the first demonstration took place in the capital (Excélsior, 1977, October 2, p. 28A). These first demonstrations began to manifest a discourse which has been called a memory of denunciation of governmental repression (Allier-Montaño, 2009). a memory centred on the repression exercised against students and the civil population that identified 2 October as both the condensation of the student movement and a 'crystallization of government repression'. Between 1970 and 1973, activists who had been imprisoned for their participation in the movement along with journalists and academics began the historical reconstruction of 1968, denouncing the violence unleashed by the government (Jiménez, 2011). A selection of these works are: El movimiento estudiantil de México by Ramón Ramírez (1969), Días de guardar by Carlos Monsiváis (1970), Los días y los años by Luis González de Alba (1971), and La noche de Tlatelolco by Elena Poniatowska (1971). They are still considered the 'classics' of the Sesenta-y-ocho movement. The latter three have been analysed in many academic texts (see, for example, Brewster 2010; Harris, 2005, Rojo, 2016).

In 1976 the first national histories to allude to or mention the Sesenta-vocho movement of 1968 were published. Historia Mínima de México and Historia general de México are both edited by Daniel Cosío Villegas. Although the former does not speak explicitly of 1968, it is implicit in the reference to the need to democratize the country's political life; the second edition of 1994 includes a text by Lorenzo Meyer which alludes to those events. However, these events form part of a broader past and are not given an exclusive space. In La violencia en la historia de México, by Manuel López Gallo, the author strongly questions the government's use of violence and authoritarianism, but also criticizes the student movement as being 'intransigent' and obsessed with seeking public dialogue at all costs. At the same time, he describes Sesenta-yocho as the culminating point of political violence in Mexico: 'With Tlatelolco the analysis of violence in Mexico is closed. Dramatic end that not even imagination could conceive as taking place in our fatherland, much less having as its scene the capital of the republic, much less in peace time. In the long and bloody history of violence in Mexico, not once had a fact of this kind occurred' (López Gallo, 1976, p. 500). López Gallo's reading is in line with the view of the students and those who supported them that had been recorded in the public space. The day of 2 October is considered to be the cumulative point of the movement, and the repression of the students is seen as the most important as-

pect of the movement. Thus, the violence and tragedy of that day gave Sesenta*y-ocho* its place in national history.

To sum up, in this period the memory of denunciation had coexisted for the first and last time with that of conspiracy. The latter fell into decline after the late 1970s, although it made fleeting reappearances at certain isolated moments, while the former has remained alive.

Denunciation of repression and praise of political action, 1978-1984

The elections of 1976 belied Echeverría's gestures of political opening since the sole candidate was José López Portillo (PRI). Nevertheless, as President of the Republic, López Portillo set in train a process that entailed important modifications for the actors participating in the political debates concerning 1968. The main points in the Political Reform of 1977 entailed the recognition in the Constitution of the political parties as 'entities of public interest' and the reform of electoral legislation. Because of this the Mexican Communist Party (PCM – Partido Comunista Mexicano) was able to emerge from illegality. 9 In 1979 for the first time, the left gave its view in the Chamber of Deputies, setting in motion the memory of denunciation of the repression: 'On 2 October, eleven years ago, the criminal slaughter by repression [shut] the door to a possibility of democratic change in our country' [my emphasis] (Diario de los Debates, 1979, October 2, p. 11). Equally important in this address was the reference to democracy and the memory of praise (Allier-Montaño, 2009) celebrating the student movement because of its attempt to open channels towards the democratization of the country, calling it a 'milestone', a 'watershed' in recent national history.

Also in 1979, the right-wing Partido Acción Nacional (PAN – National Action Party) began to manifest its own memory of Sesenta-y-ocho that, surprisingly, was not far removed from the memories of the left: '...the events of 1968 were important, because they expressed a wish for a thorough transformation of Mexican society...' (Diario de los Debates, 1980, October 2, p. 27). The PANistas were also not far from the left-wing memory of denunciation, referring to 2 October as a 'tragedy'. The PRI, in contrast, took various positions regarding their reading of the Sesenta-y-ocho movement. In this sense some *PRIistas* were not so far removed from the *memory of praise*, 'accepting' that the movement had assisted in 'perfecting Mexican democracy'. Nonetheless, most of the PRI's deputies continued to support the view and actions of Díaz Ordaz.

The period 1978-1984 also saw a new phase in the history of the commemorations of 2 October, because in this period popular marches took on a commemorative centrality. After 1978 it was possible to observe the participation of those actors that were to become repeatedly involved in these commemorations. The unions were the most important followed by political parties such as the PCM, the Partido Mexicano de los Trabajadores (PMT – Mexican WorkIn the academic sphere the descriptions of '68 as a 'struggle for democracy' appeared. Important works were *México: una democracia utópica* by Sergio Zermeño (1978), *El poder robado* by Heberto Castillo and Francisco Paoli (1980), and *Escritos sobre el movimiento del 68* by Eduardo Valle Espinoza (1984). However, preceding them in 1969 was the aforementioned *El movimiento estudiantil de México* by Ramón Ramírez (1969). Although published in the preceding period, I prefer to analyse it here due to its importance for the early interpretation of *Sesenta-y-ocho* as a struggle for democracy.

Ramírez was a researcher at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM – National Autonomous University of Mexico) who dedicated the first edition to the political prisoners in Lecumberri and gave them his royalties. The book is mandatory reading for researchers, journalists and anyone wishing to obtain a deep knowledge of the student movement. Unfortunately, as has been pointed out many times, it is often taken as a mere chronology, though one par excellence, of 'the most detailed documentary and chronological registry of the events of 1968' (Jiménez, 2011, p. 80). Yet it is so very much more than that.

The work is divided into two volumes. The first gives a chronicle of the movement from 22 July to 6 December – almost hour by hour – and the government's responses, taking into consideration several national newspapers. The second volume contains a compilation of documents linked to the various actors that took part in the conflict. If it had limited itself solely to this, it would truly have been a mere compendium of information. However, the first volume contains an essay that gives an understanding of the movement as a part of the country's democratization process, as the vanguard of a transformation of national reality. It is thus one of the first readings of *Sesenta-y-ocho* as a search for political democracy in Mexico that understands it as a 'movement of national renovation', a movement of a democratic character, 'a movement without precedent in the history of Mexico, undoubtedly the most important of recent years' (Ramírez, 1969, p. 23).

The early 1980s saw the publication of just one national history, the *Biografia de una nación* by José Fuentes Mares (1982). It mentioned *Sesenta-yocho*, although without a chapter devoted exclusively to those events. Thus, this period witnessed not only the continuation and deepening of the *memory of denunciation* through the left-wing parties represented in Parliament and via the PAN, but also its implementation in the marches of 2 October with student groups and groups and organizations of those directly affected by the repression. At the same time this *memory* began its coexistence with the *memory of praise* arising in party ranks, both on the left and in the PAN, one that linked the *Sesenta-y-ocho* movement to the struggle for democracy.

The exaltation of democracy, 1985-1992

In this next period, political debates were not substantially different from those already referred to. One major change, nonetheless, was the intensification of the link between the student movement and the struggle for democracy in the country. (Allier-Montaño, 2009) In fact, this view extended the movement to include all the individuals who had been involved. From being 'victims', the dead were transformed into 'political actors', 'agents', 11 those who had 'fought for democratic freedoms killed on 2 October 1968' (La Jornada, 1992, October 2, p. 23). At the Chamber of Deputies, for example, they were referred to as 'revolutionaries' (Diario de los Debates, Cámara de Diputados, 1985, October 1, p. 28), 'anonymous heroes' (1987, October 1, p. 50), and 'niños héroes' (1991, October 2, p. 18), in reference to the young cadets who had died at Chapultepec during the mid-nineteenth-century war against the United States. The memory of denunciation also persisted because, in the final analysis, this is not unconnected with the memory of praise. '...that democratic struggle was bought with blood...' (1985, October 1, p. 30).

As regards the specialized historiography of the movement, in 1988 a new interpretation appeared in which the former leaders of the CNH held forth on the various significances of the Sesenta-y-ocho movement. Through different type of narratives, 'They revived old differences whose nature varied from the ideological to the personal', and included the historical-epistemological aspect (Jiménez, 2011, p. 142). According to Jiménez, the principal spokesmen for the now dominant version known as the 'democratic watershed' were Álvarez Garín (La estela de Tlatelolco, 1998) and Guevara Niebla (La democracia en la calle, 1988), two of the most notable former student leaders.

A relevant novel from this period is Regina. 2 de octubre no se olvida (1987) by Antonio Velasco Piña. Based on the real-life history of Regina, a stewardess for the Olympic Games who was killed in Tlatelolco, the book presents a 'spiritual' reading of what happened in 1968. Controversial because of its proposed interpretation of the student movement, it is relevant for two reasons: 1) it is one of the books on Sesenta-y-ocho with a wide diffusion in Mexico; and 2) it is a source of inspiration for the 'reginos' or 'reginistas', a group of followers of this view, born toward the end of the 1980s.

In the novel it is presupposed that Regina has been chosen to re-awaken Mexico, which had 'fallen asleep' around the time of the Spanish conquest, and her participation in the student movement of 1968 is part of a 'mystical reawakening'. In this way, Velasco Piña generates an alternative history of Mexico '68 that is counterfactual in some aspects. A concrete example of this spiritual and alternative reading of what happened on 2 October that depoliticizes the student movement is explained not as the political actions of the Mexican government to repress the students but as a 'voluntary sacrifice' of hundreds of 'martyrs' to re-awaken the Mexican conscience. '...a ritual of sacrifice, of course voluntary and conscious. Four hundred people ... and I offer ourselves

in a holocaust in order to re-establish the lost equilibrium of the country', says Regina to her followers (Velasco Piña, 2006, p. 644). Díaz Ordaz, Echeverría and other politicians and military leaders are singled out as responsible for what happened in Tlatelolco, but in the end they are nothing but instruments necessary for the re-awakening of Mexico. Thus in Velasco Piña's view, the 'government's wish' and 'Regina's wish' are united in the 'sacrifice', not the 'massacre', of Tlatelolco. This alternative history presented the same narrated events, but gave very different causes.

In a presentation of his book in September of 1988, Velasco Piña said that a strictly political viewpoint of the student movement of 1968 did not preclude the reality of 'its spiritual dimension'. 'I understand that many people will never be able to accept it, but it's my truth, full stop' (*La Jornada*, 1988, September 30, p. 17). In sum, Velasco Piña's interpretation turned the student movement into a non-political movement, a part of a larger tapestry which received its meaning from a mystical-religious explanation.¹²

The timid demand for justice and truth, 1993-1999

Whereas the previous period had seen the rise to predominance of a democratic interpretation of the student movement from a political and historiographic viewpoint, this period witnessed a tentative and timid approach to the subjects of justice and truth regarding the 'tragic night of Tlatelolco'. The 'Comité Nacional 25 años del 68' (formed by former student leaders) proposed setting up an independent Truth Commission, which was finally confirmed on 1 September 1993. The Commission had no access to government archives, since the government alleged that a period of 30 years had to elapse before they could be made public. Under these circumstances, the Commission delivered its report on 16 December of the same year, giving an analysis of 70 cases and the full identification of 40 of the dead (Comisión de la Verdad 68, 1993).

That year was also especially important as regards discourses on *Sesenta-y-ocho*, because the *History of Mexico* textbook written for the fifth year of primary school for 1992-1993 mentioned it for the first time. ¹³ Unfortunately, criticism, both for pedagogical reasons and on account of the contents (among others because of the mention of the events of 2 October and the attribution of responsibility given to the army), led to the school books being withdrawn the following year (Villa Lever, 2012). Nevertheless from 1993 onward, there are some authors who have given a defining narrative on the *Sesenta-y-ocho* movement that assumes the revelation of 'the "truth" about the dark history of repression and violence against the movement' (Jiménez, 2011, p. 174). The reports by the commissions of 1993 and 1998 clearly form part of this narrative.

On 2 October 1997, the Chamber of Deputies voted to set up the *Comisión Especial Investigadora de los Sucesos del 68*. In December, 1998, on completion of its functions, its members were unable to reach a consensus. Among its

advances, however, some deputies emphasized that it had created the broadest documentary archive on Sesenta-y-ocho. By way of conclusion, the impossibility of exercising the right to information regarding the actions of departments of public administration was questioned. The scope of the Commissions of 1993 and 1998 had basically been limited by the lack of access to government archives for the period. Nevertheless, both commissions provided enough evidence that the demands for justice and truth had not arisen exclusively from the associations of those directly affected, such as the Comité 68. The demand to know more was becoming a majority issue, and for several political actors, such as the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) and the PAN, these demands were important.

And if these commissions did not advance far enough in the matter of truth, the academic sector was to take up the baton, producing fundamental books explaining what had happened during 1968 and in particular on 2 October: 1968. Los archivos de la violencia by Sergio Aguayo (1998); Parte de guerra. Tlatelolco 1968 by Julio Scherer & Carlos Monsiváis (1999); and Rehacer la historia. Análisis de los nuevos documentos del 2 de octubre de 1968 en Tlatelolco by Carlos Montemayor (2000).

Though they differ widely, the books by Montemayor and Aguayo are each in their own way indispensable for an understanding of the political violence unleashed by the State against the student movement, particularly in the afternoon and night of 2 October in Tlatelolco. Aguayo studies the student movement as a whole, its birth, development, abrupt end due to state repression, and the resulting consequences for the Mexican political system.¹⁴ Montemayor focuses on the events in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, giving one of the most detailed and lucid analyses up to now of the night of 2 October, for as it narrates the events, it explains how knowledge of them has been acquired over time. As illustrated by Montemayor (2000), what happened exactly on October 2 is still the subject of research, for knowledge of it is linked to the progressive discovery of sources (documentary, visual and oral), both through declassification by the government, through leaks from people linked to the repression, and the testimonies of those who participated in the organization of the military repression.

As Montemayor states, '... for many years, the military and civil authorities asserted that the snipers were students' on the afternoon of 2 October (Montemayor, 2000, p. 5). However, as he explains more than 30 years later in his analysis of the consulted sources, in the very first moments, snipers of the Presidential Staff (Estado Mayor Presidencial) fired shots from several buildings around the square, from rooftops and apartments that had previously been impounded by the Estado Mayor Presidencial, causing chaos among the army's ranks because the army had not been informed that the operation would take place. The army thought they were being attacked and this explains the high number of civilians killed by bayonets and not just by projectiles. Montemayor concludes in *Rehacer la historia* that many documents are still 'inaccessible'.

He also expresses the suspicion that the exact number of the dead will perhaps never be known. And he concludes dramatically: 'In these thirty years it has been impossible to discover the unreasonable motives of the Tlatelolco massacre because in our political system the ruler's task has been confused with a kind of private privilege that he can exert in any circumstance and time....' (Montemayor, 2000, p. 89).

As regards academic history, between 1993 and 1999, of two national histories that appeared, both contained reference to the *Sesenta-y-ocho* movement. These are *Una historia de México* by Josefina Zoriada Vázquez Vera (1994), and *Historia de México*. *Línea del tiempo* by Catalina Giménez & Enrique Rajchenberg (1998).

The year 1998 was to be an important one in the public space as regards Sesenta-y-ocho. First of all, a programme about the student movement was broadcast on TV for the first time. This was 'Díaz Ordaz y el 68' directed by Luis Supone. '... [T]he programme achieved an extraordinary audience rating: 17 points. Something typical of a television soap opera, but unthinkable in a cultural series' (Vázguez Mantecón, 2012, p. 235). Secondly, on 7 September 1998, the newspaper El Universal published some photographs in which a very voung boy had been injured in an act of aggression by riot police. Very soon, President Ernesto Zedillo claimed to recognize himself in the little boy (¡Siempre!, 1998). That fact together with the thirtieth anniversary commemoration of 2 October showed that the PRI was beginning to make an important turn in its official memory of Sesenta-v-ocho. Identifying himself with the victim, Zedillo considered that he could speak of 1968 with authority, thus offering a version in which the student movement should become a part of official history. At the same time the responsibility would fall upon the shoulders of the political old guard - Díaz Ordaz and Echeverría - and thus relieve the military establishment of its own responsibility. Finally, in that same year it was seen how the memory of praise had permeated a large part of the national left, even including some armed groups. Commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of 2 October, Subcomandante Marcos of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) stressed that 1968 was not just 2 October and the massacre at Tlatelolco, but 'a movement that fought for democracy, freedom, and justice for all Mexicans' (Subcomandante Marcos, 1998).

Regarding public policy, 1998 was also a landmark in the 'history of the history' of *Sesenta-y-ocho*. The Mexico City administration implemented (unofficially) the measure of setting the flag at half-mast on 2 October¹⁵ as a sign of mourning and remembrance of the 'fallen' military, students, and other members of the public. The Legislative Assembly of the Distrito Federal voted in favour of including within the legislative precinct the legend 'Martyrs of the Student Movement of 1968' in gilded letters. The proposal presented by the PRD was justified by the observation that the massacre was a 'fundamental event for explaining present-day Mexico' (*Diario de los Debates de la ALDF*, 1998, September 22, p. 71).

All these policies and public debates are fundamental in the memories and histories of the Sesenta-y-ocho movement, for they were the first attempts to give an institutionalized place to the student movement in official history, even though in those years the impetus had come only from the political left. As I have shown throughout this article, a consensus on the memories (and the histories) of 1968 had been increasing year after year.

The consensus: the watershed of recent national history, 2000-2015

An important moment concerning the memories of the Sesenta-y-ocho movement coincided with the PAN's entry in national government. On 27 November 2001, the new president Vicente Fox created, by official decree, the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Historical Social and Political Movements (FEMOSPP - Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado) with the purpose of opening two principal lines of investigation in reference to '...the repression by the authoritarian regime against members of opposition movements: the legal and the historical' (FEMOSPP, 2006, p. 7). In November of 2006, as the Fox administration was coming to an end, the work of the Prosecutor was declared to be concluded, although neither of those two objectives had been achieved. Yet in effect a de facto amnesty had been created (Aguayo & Treviño, 2006). The voluminous 'Historical Report to the Mexican Society' (Informe histórico a la sociedad mexicana 2006) was presented, confirming the serious violations of human rights that the Mexican state had incurred, but without clarifying the responsibilities or providing the definitive data regarding the figures for those violations.

As regards justice, the FEMOSPP opened a criminal process for the massacre of 2 October 1968 against Echeverría Álvarez and another seven former functionaries and military men accused of genocide and illegal deprivation of liberty (Comité 68 et al., 2006). On 29 November 2006, the Segundo Tribunal Unitario de Procesos Penales Federales issued an order for the incarceration of Echeverría Álvarez for the crime of genocide. His advanced age of over seventy absolved him from serving his sentence, and he only remained under house arrest until the resolution of the trial. On 26 March 2009, the judges confirmed 'that the penal action was not subject to statute of limitations, that the corpus delicti of genocide had been confirmed, but that the responsibility of Luis Echeverría had not been proved' (La Jornada, 2009, March 27). Thus a kind of justice without justice was arrived at: the crime had indeed been committed, but no culprit had been found. Despite FEMOSPP's lack of success, the actions and discourses coming from the government of Vicente Fox enabled the official recognition of the public memories of denunciation and praise that had come to dominate the public space. It could now officially be said that the government's repression had been excessive and unnecessary, and at the same time, point to the movement as a watershed in recent national history for its influence on the struggle for democracy.

During Fox's administration, the student movement was again written into the school textbooks of 2002. At present this history is included in the revised course for the fifth year of primary school. In the four pages devoted to it, an emphasis is placed upon the fact that not only students were involved, but also housewives, teachers, workers and other 'citizens unsatisfied with the authoritarianism of the government, which in turn had accused the students of being a threat to social peace' (Reyes Tosqui et al., 2010, p. 153). Although it does mention the events of 2 October, the text does not go into details regarding the repression suffered then. Despite these omissions, this was a very significant moment in the historicization of the *Sesenta-y-ocho* movement; for the first time it had been included as a fundamental part of national, official, and academic history.

The year 2007 is important because of the inauguration at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in Tlatelolco of the *Memorial del 68* dedicated to the movement. The establishment of this memorial museum represented a strong act of governmental support for the generation of 1968. This was the first time the government had dedicated a museum to an event occurring later than the Revolution of 1910. The inauguration also stimulated the recognition of the movement of 1968 and the involvement of the Comité 68. In fact many considered the dedication of the *Memorial del 68* as the entry of the movement into the country's official history (Vázquez Mantecón, 2012).

The national commemorations marked the movement's fortieth anniversary in 2008. This was a fundamental moment in the consolidation of the place reserved for it in the 'national genealogy'. The PRD also presented a bill in the Senate for a paragraph to be added to Article 18 of the Law on the National Coat of Arms, Flag and Anthem, and the establishment of 2 October as a date of solemn commemoration in the national calendar: 'The anniversary of the victims in the struggle for democracy in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas at Tlatelolco, in 1968'. It is worth stressing two points of that initiative. Firstly, this was the first time that the state was recognized as being responsible for the massacre, and secondly, that repression had taken place within the framework of 'a brutal action consisting in a disproportionate use of repressive force, during a regime closed to respect for citizens' liberties' (Gaceta del Senado, 2008, December 2). In 2011, the Chamber of Deputies decided by absolute majority to accept the proposal of declaring 2 October 'as a solemn date for the nation as a whole', opting to lower the national flag to half-mast as a sign of mourning at schools and public buildings, as well as at Mexico's consulates and embassies abroad.

This political consensus can be observed in other spaces. In 2012, in the midst of the presidential election campaign, a student movement titled #Yosoy132 emerged; this movement demanded, in general terms, 'an authentic democracy' and a democratization of the communications media. It is of interest to the present article to mention the following claim by those involved: 'We are the sons and daughters of student massacres and repressions, of dirty war,¹⁷

of rampant impunity.... We are the children of a new Mexico which cries "enough is enough; never again" (#YoSoy132, 2012 [my emphasis]).

At his swearing in as President of the Republic on 1 December 2012, the PRIista Enrique Peña Nieto was unable to ignore this consensus, and in the same way, he also could not continue with the narrative of conspiracy that for many years has ceased to convince anyone: 'Since 1910 and throughout the twentieth century, millions of Mexicans of all political affiliations have waged a great civic battle for democracy. But it was through the student movement of 1968 and the successive political reforms, that our democracy was accelerated' (Excélsior, 2012, December 1). Nonetheless, he made no mention of the state repression, thus observing a pact of silence with his political party.

This consensus has reached the academic world as well. Of the seventeen works of national history for the period 2000 to 2015, fifteen included the student movement amongst their contents. And in several of them 1968 was dealt with specifically. For example in Volume 2 of Conservadurismo y derechas en la historia de México, edited by Erika Pani (2009), we find the text 'El lado oscuro de la Luna. El movimiento conservador de 1968', by Ariel Rodríguez Kuri. Several chapters in the four volumes of Una historia contemporánea de México. Transformaciones y permanencias by Lorenzo Meyer and Ilán Bizberg (2003) take in the events from different points of view: political and economic, as well as relations with the United States.

The consensus is maintained in the historiography of Sesenta-y-ocho, across three types of narrative: 1) its presentation as a breaking point for the birth of diverse later forms of political struggle; 2) the polemics of former leaders of the CNH regarding the significance of the events of 1968; and 3) the addition of the account of FEMOSPP in this period to the regime's history of violence (Jiménez, 2011). An important novelty in the historiography of this period was the incorporation of gender studies. From the year 2000, the works of authors such as Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen (2003), and of Gloria Tirado Villegas (2004) started to include the role of women in the student movement. Finally it is important to stress the appearance of a new generation of historians who, not yet born or still very young in 1968, approach the events of 1968 within long term projects and under novel perspectives, such as Álvaro Vázquez Mantecón (2012) and cultural history; Ariel Rodríguez Kuri (2003) and the origins of the movement; the historiographic studies of Héctor Jiménez (2011); and the photographs of Sesenta-y-ocho presented by Alberto del Castillo (2012).

It is beyond the scope of this analysis, but I would like to say a few words about the book by Alberto del Castillo, by way of a revision of the historiographic renewal that has taken place over the last few years. Del Castillo chose a novel perspective on the movement of '68: the analysis of the student movement not from government documents, nor from the valuable testimonial references of the protagonists, but from the photographs of what has been considered as the most important event of the second half of the twentieth century in Mexico. La fotografía y la construcción de un imaginario unravels the contexts of the images of 1968 and suggests possible interpretations of the processes in order to make sense of the images. In this text, the photos generate the discourse: the images are not used as mere illustration but as sources to build history. This is a history of the photographic representations of the 1968 student movement in Mexico, which offers a perspective of the authoritarian Mexican political system from the point of view of the relations between the government and the press: the control exerted over the latter through printing paper, manifestos and commercial advertising.

A fundamental aspect of this work is that the author disassociates himself from the teleological view that focuses exclusively on the facts of 2 October. 'We think that in this case it is very clear that these kinds of interpretations that associate the student demonstrations with repression have privileged the dark side of a movement that cannot be bounded by those limits' (Del Castillo, 2012, p. 15). Few historians today would disagree with Del Castillo and his choice not to favour a date that has certainly been a tragic one, that concentrates the injustice of the Mexican political system of the past, and that still requires a historical and juridical clarification, but that in no way was the centre of the student movement of that year.

By way of conclusion

The growing significance of 1968 can be observed in the political memories of the left and the right, in the historiographies of academia, and in the presentations of the national history of Mexico. In this way, the student movement of '68 has become one of the most important events in the twentieth century after the Mexican Revolution. A survey taken in August of 2007 showed that the massacre of Tlatelolco was the third best known date in the historical calendar (36.2 per cent), following the beginning of the War for Independence (49 per cent) and the start of the Mexican Revolution (39.8 per cent) (Consulta Mitofsky, 2007). A survey of 2008 illustrates that for 64 per cent of those interviewed, the student movement of '68 was associated with the date of 2 October and the repression of the students, while only 8 per cent associated it with positive elements (Buendía, 2008).

Above all, it is the tragic outcome of 2 October that has given the *Sesenta-y-ocho* movement its prominence in national history. These memories have tended to mythicize the student movement. From positions of both denunciation and praise, the 'social agreements' on how *Sesenta-y-ocho* ought to be remembered could be an impediment to independent academic discussion. There are historians who doubt that *Sesenta-y-ocho* can be associated with the struggle for democracy. But it has become more difficult to debate this now that the idea of the student movement as the starting point of the democratic struggle has become so socially and politically predominant.

Analyses of the public memories of the student movement of 1968 illustrate that what is remembered and what is forgotten have a historicity that must be situated within its political and social context; who remembers and what is remembered, and how and when, is important. And while this continues to be history in the making, for the moment we can at least observe how the Sesentay-ocho movement has gradually won a consensus regarding its central importance in the national history of twentieth-century Mexico.

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Notes

- 1. A first approach to the public debates held in newspapers can be found in Allier-Montaño (2009). For an approach to political parties' memories of Sesenta-y-ocho, see Allier-Montaño (2015).
- 2. By 2008, Sánchez Sáenz (2008, p. 11) had located 406 references about the student movement, including testimonies, literature, journalism and history. This bibliography has grown in recent years. My aim is not to give an analysis of all the writings devoted to the Sesenta-y-ocho events that have generated some kind of debate in public space. Martré (1998) has already studied the representations of the movement in the Mexican novel, and Jiménez (2011) has analysed the various narratives on Mexico '68 and their public impact. I also do not intend to focus on the study of some narratives for each period, something that has already been done (see e.g. Brewster, 2010). As will be seen, I only mention some selected works of this large production, analysing for each period one or two examples that allow me to defend my hypotheses.
- 3. National history is understood as works of general history about Mexico, those that aim at setting forth an integrated general account of the country's past – in other words, those that present a consensus opinion of what merits inclusion in the history of a community as well as the periodization accepted by the majority of historians. They are works that represent, therefore, a common view of society elaborated from within the academic establishment.
- 4. As Pani & Rodríguez Kuri (2010) point out, no universally accepted definition exists of the term 'official history'. I agree with Wertsch & Rozin (1998) when they say that official history: 1) enables the nation to be imagined, creating and propagating a vision of the past; 2) promotes a common identity; and 3) contributes to instilling loyalty. Official history in this sense will be history that is normally created and propagated by states and governments (by setting certain dates for national observance, museological treatment, special commemorations and school textbooks).
- 5. From early 1968, the president of the Republic seemed convinced that in the course of that year a conspiracy would be set in motion to destabilize his government and impede the satisfactory development of the Olympic Games commencing on 12 October that were to 'showcase' Mexico's entry in the club of developed nations. See Rodríguez Kuri (2003), Álvarez Garín (1998), and Ramírez (1969).
- 6. This was an intelligence agency dependent on the Ministry of Interior. Its main function was to collect information on 'subversive' activities in the country. See Aguayo (2001).
- 7. In 1969 President Díaz Ordaz assumed responsibility for the events of 2 October: 'For my part, I assume all the responsibility: personal, ethical, social, legal, political, historical, for the Government's decisions regarding the events of last year' (Diario de los Debates, 1969, September 1, p. 25.
- 8. First introduced in 1941 against manifestations in favour of Nazism, over the years it came to be used against the political opposition.
- 9. Although the PCM was not prohibited during the 1960s, it was strongly persecuted. From 1968, however, it was banned until 1977.
- 10. I found the first reference to the Comité 68 in the report of the Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado (FEMOSPP, 2006, chapter 12: p. 4), that says the Comité was founded in 1978. However, Raúl Álvarez Garín, one of its most important leaders, has pointed out that the Comité 68 was formally constituted as a civil association only in the year 2000.

- 11. The reading of 'victims' has not, however, disappeared. They are now 'victimized heroes'.
- 12. Some of the public debates generated by the novel can be seen in Allier-Montaño (2010).
- 13. In Mexico standard textbooks are provided free of charge for the school levels six to twelve years of age). The expression 'free textbooks' has, however, acquired a special connotation, denoting only these government-designed and produced books (even when there are other textbooks available free of charge). School children throughout the country study not only the same syllabus, but also those same 'free textbooks'. Hence their importance for studying the official historiography of the nation.
- 14. This work has been studied more; see e.g. Brewster (2010).
- 15. In 1997, elections were held for the first time to elect the mayor of the Distrito Federal; until then the post of *regente* had been directly appointed by the President of Republic. The PRD won the elections with an ample majority.
- 16. For reasons of space, it is impossible to address this matter further here. See Allier-Montaño (2012), Vázquez Mantecón (2007) and Rojo (2016).
- 17. In a video (see: Yosoy132, 2012) in which various students are seen presenting what they called the 'Second Manifesto'; above them are several banners, upon which can be read: '2 October 1968'; 'Dirty War'; 'PRI: 70 years in power'.

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