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The Haunting Parallel Amid Governmental Responses: Tlatelolco Massacre & the COVID-19 Pandemic

Rosario Castellanos', Memorial de Tlatelolco Offers Some Respite

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“Memorial de Tlatelolco” is a poem that was written by Mexican poet and activist, Rosario Castellanos in 1968 following the Tlatelolco Massacre. The massacre was in response to a student protest widely known as *Movimiento Estudiantil*.

The massacre was an act of violence by the Mexican government, which killed & tortured hundreds of protestors, and subsequently, “denied (its occurrence) for 33 years” (Schroeder 2002).

Castellanos’ words highlight confusion, fear, and the desire to uncover the truth. Her words served as a voice of hope for the Mexican people in a time of uncertainty.

“¿Quiénes los que agonizan, los que mueren?”, wrote Castellanos, a voice of the Mexican people when their sisters and brothers spoke of murder and the government silenced their cries.

<p><i>Extracto de : “Memorial de Tlatelolco”</i></p> <p><i>Escrito Por: Rosario Castellanos (1968)</i></p> <p><i>Y a esa luz, breve y lívida, ¿Quién? ¿Quién es el que mata?</i></p> <p><i>¿Quiénes los que agonizan, los que mueren?</i></p> <p><i>¿Los que se pudren en el hospital?</i></p> <p><i>¿Los que se quedan mudos, para siempre, de espanto?</i></p>	<p><i>Excerpt from: “In Memory of Tlatelolco”</i></p> <p><i>Translated By: David Bowles (2018)</i></p> <p><i>And in that light, brief and fierce, who? Who is it that kills?</i></p> <p><i>Who are those who agonize, those who die?</i></p> <p><i>Those who rot away in the hospital?</i></p> <p><i>Those who fall silent, forever, from fear?</i></p>
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Today, Spring of 2020, we are living through the emergence of COVID-19, a tumultuous time. A time of sadness, a time of loneliness, a time of fear, a time of uncertainty. A time when we need clarity, we need truth, we need leadership.

We have been faced with an act of violence. Violence in the shape of, “denial and dysfunction as the coronavirus raged,” (Abutaleb 2020). Denial of actions and responses by the American government.

Castellanos’ words, instill familiarity in our souls as we watch the government deny their actions against humanity, as they deny the hand they offered in service to the virus’ onslaught.

“Who are those who agonize, those who die? Those who rot away in the hospital?” This translation of Castellanos serves as a voice for the American people as our sisters and brothers speak of murder and the government silences their cries.



A scene from the Tlatelolco Massacre on October 2nd, 1968 in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, Mexico City. Over 10,000 student leaders gathered in protest of unethical government spending. There were over 300 deaths and 1000 injuries. Image from Mexican News Daily (October 2014)

<p><i>Recuerdo, recordemos</i></p> <p><i>hasta que la justicia se siente entre nosotros.</i></p>	<p><i>I remember, we remember</i></p> <p><i>until we feel justice at last here among us.</i></p>
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No matter what they say (the government), “Recuerdo, recordemos,” wrote Castellanos. In 1968, her words let the Mexican people know they were not alone and they were not crazy, in a time of denial and governmental ambiguity. As we live through this time of uncertainty amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic, let us remember Castellanos’ words, “Recuerdo, recordemos, hasta que la justicia se siente entre nosotros.”

I will remember, you will remember, though our cries may be silenced, we are not alone.



A scene from the funeral of an American firefighter who died due to complications of COVID-19. As of April 2020, more than 60,000 Americans have died, and over 1 million remain sick. Image by Amy Newman, USA TODAY Network (April 2020)