

Staging Gendered Perspectives on Mexico's 1968 Social Movements: Elena Garro's *Sócrates y los gatos* and Pilar Campesino's *Octubre terminó hace mucho tiempo*

Linda Saborío
Northern Illinois University
lsaborio@niu.edu

Literary responses to Mexico's 1968 sociopolitical movements tend to focus on male perspectives, resulting in a largely masculine version of the events. This study expands on this rather homogeneous response by focusing on two plays by women: *Sócrates y los gatos* by Elena Garro and *Octubre terminó hace mucho tiempo* by Pilar Campesino. Both works problematize the male-centered sociopolitical movement that advocated equity and inclusiveness while marginalizing women's contributions to social activism. By focusing on personal relationships in parallel to political discourse, the two pieces underscore the political as explicitly intrinsic to gendered concepts and structures. Through their critique of Mexico's political ideology, Garro and Campesino accentuate a male-centered social stratification that severely discounts women's contributions to social change. Their plays propose an understanding of gender inequality as an encounter between a paternalistic nation-state, a tradition of masculine ideology as the center of Mexican thought and social movement, and a patriarchy embedded in identity formation.

Keywords: gender studies, Mexican theater, Mexico 68, Tlatelolco massacre, feminist theory

Las respuestas literarias ante los movimientos sociopolíticos de México de 1968 tienden a centrarse en las perspectivas de los hombres, lo que resulta en una versión principalmente masculina de los eventos. Este estudio amplía esta respuesta bastante homogénea al enfocar dos obras escritas por mujeres: *Sócrates y los gatos* de Elena Garro y *Octubre terminó hace mucho tiempo* por Pilar Campesino. Ambos dramas problematizan el movimiento sociopolítico androcéntrico que abogaba por la equidad y la inclusión mientras marginaba las contribuciones de las mujeres al activismo social. Al dar cabida a las relaciones personales paralelas al discurso político, las dos piezas subrayan lo político como explícitamente intrínseco a los conceptos y estructuras basados

en el género. A través de su crítica de la ideología política de México, Garro y Campesino acentúan una estratificación social androcéntrica que severamente subestima las contribuciones de las mujeres al cambio social. Sus obras proponen una comprensión de la desigualdad de género como el encuentro entre un estado-nación paternalista, una tradición de ideología masculina como centro del pensamiento y del movimiento social mexicanos y un patriarcado incrustado en la formación de la identidad.

Palabras clave: estudios de género, teatro mexicano, México 68, masacre de Tlatelolco, teoría feminista

Historical Context, 1968

The year 1968 marks one of the most tragic and pivotal times in Mexico's history. Mexicans were preparing to welcome thousands to their homeland for the summer Olympic Games. As the first Latin American country bestowed with hosting honors, Mexico appeared determined to project the image of a progressive country eager to distinguish itself from other emerging nations. This image, however, was severely marred on October 2, a mere ten days before the opening of the games, when the government of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964–1970) used brute force, tanks, and machine guns to violently repress a peaceful demonstration led by unarmed students and civilians in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in the Tlatelolco section of the capital city. Sources originating primarily from Mexican authorities initially reported only four deaths and twenty wounded. However, according to more recent investigations, thousands of civilians may have been killed or imprisoned, with many more reported missing.¹

The October 2 rally was organized as a peaceful demonstration against police brutality and government repression and signaled growing distrust of the Díaz Ordaz regime and the government's attempt to project to an international audience the image of a democratic Mexican state that did not coincide with the long-standing rule by one political party: the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). The massacre at Tlatelolco marked the culmination of years of civil unrest that included workers' strikes, student protests, and public demonstrations.

Intellectual Responses to the 68 Massacre

Mexican intellectuals, journalists, political dissidents, and noted authors have published myriad analyses centering on the events of 1968. Some readily criticize Mexico's corrupt political regime and authoritarianism as well as the numerous

¹ For a more current account of the events at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, see "Mexico's 1968 Massacre: What Really Happened?" *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio (Dec. 1, 2008). <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97546687>

government-colluding media outlets that embarked on a campaign referred to as Operation Amnesia, while others sought to place the blame on foreign influences in Mexico.² Numerous literary responses, coined "Tlatelolco literature," carry a message of disenchantment and frustration and craft an image of a paradoxically violent yet paternalistic one-party government represented by the PRI. Octavio Paz, one of Mexico's most prominent intellectuals, protested the 1968 massacre by resigning as Mexico's ambassador to India and then self-exiling in the United States. Soon after, he published *Postdata* (1970), a collection of critical and controversial essays that includes a particularly punitive denouncement of Mexico's administrative response to the massacre titled "Olimpiada y Tlatelolco." Other noted works include: Carlos Monsiváis, *Días de guardar* (1970); Carlos Fuentes, *Tiempo mexicano* (1971); José Revueltas, *México '68: Juventud y revolución* (1978); Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *'68: The Mexican Autumn of the Tlatelolco Massacre* (2018/1991); Enrique Krauze, *La presidencia imperial: De Manuel Ávila Camacho a Carlos Salinas de Gortari* (1997); and Jorge Volpi, *La imaginación y el poder: Una historia intelectual de 1968* (1998).

Studies on literary responses to the massacre tend to focus on specific genres such as poetry and essay but for the most part, do not mention theatrical productions and published dramatic works. In her analysis of a sampling of Tlatelolco literature, Dolly Young remarks that "writers sought expression through a variety of literary forms including essays, articles, documentary texts, chronicles, poems, short stories, and novels" (1985, 73). Young does not mention theatrical works, even though several dramas that clearly fall under the category of Tlatelolco literature were produced and published. Olga Harmony's analysis of Mexican theater and the 68 movements surprisingly asserts that very few publications centered on this period were theatrical pieces, and even fewer were written by women (1992, 86). One study that briefly mentions the inclusion of theater as part of the 1968 movement repertoire is Gloria Tirado Villegas' *La otra historia* (2004), which is a study, interestingly, of women's contributions to the 68 movements. Jacqueline Bixler rightly argues in "Asignatura pendiente" that several plays were written and produced in response to 1968, but lacking is recognition of and intellectual responses to these plays, to the dramatists, and to their pivotal role in not only reenacting the events of 1968 but also in stimulating audiences to remember, recreate, and respond to them (2020, 518).³

Noticeable in studies on Tlatelolco literature is the modest number of references to works by female authors. This is not to suggest that women did not publish in

² In "Re-memembering the Past," Jacqueline Bixler describes Operation Amnesia: "Rather than admit responsibility, the Mexican government blamed the deaths on outside agitators, reported the number of dead as thirty-two rather than the hundreds commonly believed to have been gunned down, and did everything possible to suppress any official recording of the event" (2002, 119).

³ Only a handful of studies have been published to date; one example is Guyomarch Le Roux's "El humor en el 'Teatro del 68'" (2007).

response to the 68 movements. Rosario Castellanos' poem "Memorial de Tlatelolco" (1968), María Luisa Mendoza's novel *Con Él, conmigo, con nosotros tres* (1971), and one of the most recognized works on the 68 massacre both nationally and internationally, Elena Poniatowska's testimonial *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971), are just a few examples. For theatrical works on the 68 movements by women dramatists, even fewer are available.

Shifting the Focus to Women's Perspectives

In this study, two plays by Mexican women dramatists that focus on Mexico's 1968 movements and were written during the years immediately following the October 2 massacre will be analyzed: *Sócrates y los gatos* (written in 1969 and published posthumously in 2003) by well-known author Elena Garro, and *Octubre terminó hace mucho tiempo* (whose initial staging in 1970 was officially blocked) by Pilar Campesino.⁴ Informed by Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen's 2003 study of masculine spaces and narratives on Mexico's 68 movements, in which they argue that public narratives of 68 predominantly expressed an "elite male leader version" of Tlatelolco (619), this study proposes to focus on the few *female* voices addressing the turbulent times.

Particular attention will be placed on the gendered perspectives of Garro and Campesino's plays and how they offer a more intimate account of the social events of the period. The two plays evidence distinct theoretical approaches in that Garro's is deeply personal and structured on Aristotelian tradition, while Campesino's adopts the more pessimistic view of absurdist playwrights. However, each dramatist uses a feminist lens and stages a cynical perspective of Mexico's official history and of a political regime that paternalistically sought to undermine social movements and their influence on feminist ideology (i.e., on nonmachista thought). Through their critique of Mexico's political ideology, Garro and Campesino's works underscore a male-centered social stratification that severely discounts women's contributions to social change in their country. Their plays propose an understanding of gender inequality as an encounter between a paternalistic nation-state, a tradition of masculine ideology as the center of Mexican thought and social movement, and patriarchy embedded in identity and culture formation.

⁴ Another noteworthy female playwright, Gabriela Yncán, published *Nomás que salgamos* in 1988. Focusing on the tragic event of October 2, Yncán's work underscores the repetitious nature of Mexico's politics as well as the country's inability to *salir* from (leave) the basement, an analogy to the government's resistance to change despite the numerous protests and demands for reform. Yncán's work is not included in this study because the publication date is twenty years later, and her piece does not focus on women's perspectives—indeed, the characters are all men (Yncán 2018).

To understand feminist thought and criticism during this period, it is essential to include one of Mexico’s most prolific writers on feminist topics, Rosario Castellanos, who ironically maintains that traditionally, women do not advocate for themselves but instead must rely on men to mediate for them. She explains: “In Mexico, when we utter the word woman, we refer to a creature who is dependent upon male authority: be it her father’s, her brother’s, her husband’s, or her priest’s” (1988, 261). Inhibiting women from self-mediation maps them onto a space where they remain dependent on males and a male-centered social structure. María Elena de Valdés’ study of feminist theory and literary criticism in Mexico takes this idea one step further. She prioritizes the need to center on gender identities in relation to social structures and spaces. Unlike the 1970s feminist movements in the United States that focused their attention on opposing neoconservative, sexist agendas, Valdés argues that “the Mexican feminist priority is one of changing the social structure rather than addressing the symptoms of sexism” (1998, 31).

Building on this concept, Tessa Cubitt and Helen Greenslade argue that Mexico’s social structure is clearly polarized into dichotomous and opposing public and private realms. This polarity, they argue, “has created a set of distinctions which associates politics and masculinity with the public world and women with the private, nonpolitical, domestic realm” (1997, 53). The struggle for women’s rights and emancipation in Mexico during this period, while not simplistic by any means, clearly involved challenging long-established social structures and an essentialized understanding of women’s subjectivity that relegated women to the private sphere, effectively alienating them from public spaces and political mobilization.

In their study of political space and gendering, Frazier and Cohen analyze male leaders’ memoirs originating in prison spaces along with women’s oral accounts of their political activism during Mexico’s 68 social movement period. Frazier and Cohen argue that male leaders’ publications shaped “male leaders’ subjectivity and position[ed] them as the movement’s official spokesmen” (2003, 622; original emphasis). With this gendering of political spaces and writings, leadership became “overdetermined as male and *el pueblo*, or ‘the people’ (understood in populist rhetoric as the beneficiaries of that leadership) as female” (622). One consequence of such gendering was the lack of attention to women’s contributions to the movements and the misapprehension of women’s activism in what were traditionally viewed as public, and therefore male, spaces.

In *1968 Mexico*, Susana Draper (2018) expands on a predominantly homogeneous male voice that defined the national imaginaries emerging from the 68 movements by acknowledging marginalized voices, including female ones. A more intimate, personal, and marginalized feminist gaze, Draper argues, allows us to know about a new perspective and observe this historical moment from a distinctive angle,

particularly given that many narrations “remain framed by a limited selection of voices, showing only one side of a polyphonic moment of protest and mobilization” (13).

Regrettably, some contributions by women to Mexico’s 68 social movements were associated with improper sexual activity and immoral behavior. Moving from the private space of the home to the public arena was not a simple task for many Mexican female activists. Young women often were expected to seek their parents’ permission to leave their homes, particularly if they intended to stay out later than what was deemed an appropriate hour. Outside influences, such as the hippie movement, international icons of an emerging counterculture, and miniskirt fashions were considered an affront to deeply engrained Mexican cultural, religious, and gender morals. Elaine Carey notes in *Plaza of Sacrifices* (2005) that women who participated in the *guardias*—groups of students who guarded school and university campuses from police or military invasions—often had to confront gendered stereotypes: “Their transgressions defied strict gender codes that the middle-class in particular were expected to uphold. Perceived as public and perhaps sexually active, women in the *guardias* were the embodiment of the dangerous *chica moderna* (modern girl) who was influenced by foreign and negative concepts of life” (53). As another example, Paco Ignacio Taibo, II (2018/1991) includes in his text ‘68 a single, brief chapter dedicated to women’s activism in the 1960s. Taibo does acknowledge the importance of the 68 social movements to women’s liberation: “but to be a woman in ‘68 was no bad thing. For thousands of sisters the times offered a chance to be equal” (46), yet he regrettably titles this chapter “Of Women and Mattresses,” an overt linking of women and sexuality.

The two plays published by dramatists Elena Garro and Pilar Campesino that are the focus of this study expand on a narrative specific to Mexico’s 68 social movements—one that has been monopolized by male voices.⁵ The political statements in these two plays outline a feminized perspective that is distinctively not male. Garro and Campesino’s dramatic works provide readers with a sense of Mexican womanhood within the context of social protest, politics, and patriarchy during a period when long-established ideologies on counterculture, sexism, racism, and more were being challenged in several countries around the world, including France and the United States.

⁵ Emilio Carballido notes in *Teatro joven de México* that Pilar Campesino was known professionally until the late 1970s as Pilar Retes (in Campesino 1979).

Elena Garro's *Sócrates y los gatos*

Garro's explicitly autobiographical work offers significant insight into a female presence during the 68 social movements, all the while highlighting her personal history, story, and perspectives. Published posthumously in 2003 but reportedly written in 1969, *Sócrates y los gatos* is an intriguing theatrical piece about a mother and daughter falsely accused of instigating antigovernmental social movements, including the 1968 protest at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas.⁶ Seeking refuge in the home of their former domestic helper (who later marries the mother's uncle), Verónica and her daughter discover that they were implicated in an elaborate plot involving communist leaders, activists from the student movement, and local government officials. The plan involves incriminating both women in the student protests of October 1968 along with a political dissident and an informer, and then murdering all four of them.

Garro's play is her response to a tumultuous period in her life following the 68 massacre when she was accused of instigating the student movement and then serving as a key informer against the intellectuals who had supported it. Though clearly a personal piece, the play also provides a unique perspective into women's political involvement in the social movements of this period, one that was often overlooked if not ignored. The two female protagonists appear to be "trapped" in a conventional space (maid María's house) and, consequently, in conventional roles. They are disempowered by a patriarchal system in which narration about protest is gendered as masculine, and feminine discourses are silenced.

Sócrates y los gatos was written possibly just one year following the massacre, a period when Garro's personal life was profoundly impacted by a series of events and unfounded accusations. First, she was implicated as a direct coconspirator in the massacre when a well-known student activist, Sócrates Amado Campos Lemus, named her as one of the principal instigators of the student demonstrations. As the title of the play suggests, Sócrates is clearly cited as the one who deceived Garro and her daughter. Second, following Campos Lemus' denunciation to officials, it was reported in a very public manner that Garro had betrayed the very intellectuals who supported the movement: "The newspapers published lists of the conspiratory intellectuals and presented them as if Garro had denounced them" (Muncy 1990, 36).

The very public accusation of Garro's involvement and alleged betrayal of her fellow intellectuals created serious problems for both her and her daughter Helena Paz for

⁶ The uncertainty of the date 1969 is due to the manuscript being found in a trunk containing numerous unpublished works by Garro. See Carvajal Dávila, "Biobibliografía de Elena Garro" (2003).

numerous years. After being singled out in the newspapers, they abandoned their home and went into hiding. Fearing a communist threat in addition to persecution by the government, they eventually decided on self-exile. This period of persecution and paranoia is reflected in Garro's collection of stories, *Andamos huyendo Lola* (1980). It is quite evident that *Sócrates y los gatos* reflects Garro's keen political awareness following the 1968 events in Tlatelolco and her subsequent betrayal by one of the student activists. Perhaps her reluctance to publish the drama during her lifetime is also reflected in the work's message, as outlined below.⁷

In *Sócrates y los gatos* Garro's alter ego and the play's protagonist, Verónica, along with Verónica's daughter Lely (who represents Garro's real-life daughter) are convinced that officials have labeled them antigovernment conspirators and are threatening to kill them for their alleged protest against the Mexican government. Verónica is, like other characters in Garro's texts, a victim of circumstances and a scapegoat. As the play progresses, we realize that Verónica and her daughter have been manipulated by government officials, leaders of the Communist Party, and members of their own family, and are being threatened with torture and murder. This rather convoluted plot, where many ideologies (some contradictory) converge, is reflected in other official accounts on Mexico's 68 social movements, such as the CIA's intelligence report that admits an uncertainty as to the exact political and dominant ideology influencing the social activities (Carey 2005, 145). As Armando Partida Tayzan notes in his analysis of Garro's play, "*Sócrates y los gatos* no es una crónica dramatizada de los sucesos del 68, sino un relato dramático ambiguo y polisémico sobre dichos acontecimientos, muy acorde con el registro de nuestra historia nacional acerca de esos hechos aún sin esclarecer" (2003, 128).

Parallel to this sociopolitical dramatic storyline runs the personal story of Verónica's family, with her questionable aunt/former housemaid María at the heart of it. María and her second husband, Echauri, both members of the Communist Party, offer refuge to Verónica and her daughter when the two women abandon their home due to threats and extortions. Unbeknownst to Verónica, Echauri frequently receives bribes from the police in exchange for information regarding her whereabouts and the people she contacts (particularly if she tries to connect with the student leader whom they wish to eliminate). The house where Verónica and her daughter take refuge thus becomes a contradictory space of both protection and persecution.

Reminiscent of Antonin Artaud's work in the Theater of Cruelty, this space of persecution is manifested in the treatment of two cats belonging to Verónica and Lely that are starved, tortured, and eventually put to a horrendous death by electrocution.

⁷ For additional information on Campos Lemus' public disclosure, see Carey's *Plaza of Sacrifices* (2005).

In effect, the cats, named Humitos y Juan Lanas, are symbolic of Verónica and Lely, as Verónica explains: "Somos dos vagabundas condenadas a la muerte, como Humitos y Juan Lanas..." (Garro 2003, 96). They are trapped in a problematic space of protection/persecution and face no alternative but to remain with their relatives in a cramped, untidy apartment filled with old family photographs and memories.

Although publicly Garro never referred to herself as a feminist, she is known for addressing feminist concerns in her numerous works, such as the limits that society imposes on women. Sandra Messinger Cypess notes in her study of Octavio Paz and Elena Garro titled *Uncivil Wars* (2021) that Garro's writings on the Mexican Revolution and social movements tend to focus on the perspectives of women and depict a more private, emotional position than that of her former male partner, Octavio Paz (153). In well-known publications about the 68 massacre, such as Paz's essay "Olimpiada y Tlatelolco," generalized phrases such as "los voceros del pueblo," "la rebelión juvenil," and "medios de propaganda y de coacción moral" predominate. Elena Poniatowska's compilation of oral testimonies, *La noche de Tlatelolco*, offers undeniably candid accounts of the event, yet any sense of intimacy with the reader is shifted to accommodate the many voices sharing moments of tragedy, sorrow, and disbelief. Garro, in contrast, presents an opportunity to witness events occurring during this period in Mexico from the perspective of two women: Verónica and María. Messinger Cypess' study, which includes a very brief mention of *Sócrates y los gatos*, notes how audiences get a real sense in Garro's play of the "persecution and helplessness that the two women experienced" (2021, 136).

This more intimate, female perspective in *Sócrates y los gatos* reveals a gendered ideology in which women struggle to negotiate their own outcome in an androcentric society. Verónica is evidently being manipulated by both the Communist Party and government officials to entrap a prominent student leader. María is also exploited by her second husband, Echaury, who in turn conspires with the police, accepts their bribery money, and admits to knowing beforehand about the massacre at Tlatelolco (91). Notwithstanding the commonality of subsisting within a macho-centered system, these two female characters appear to represent opposite paradigms: Verónica comes from an upper-class culture ("es uno de los burgueses"), while María served as a housemaid for Verónica's family before marrying the uncle, a fact that Verónica does not let her forget: "¿Cuál humillación? Eras del pueblo, eras mi criada, y estás con el pueblo. ¿Por qué quieres aparecer como señora?" (100).

In addition to the class issue is the question of culture: Verónica is proudly Mexican, whereas María is repeatedly reminded that she is an immigrant from Spain contracted to work for Verónica's family. Moreover, Verónica is portrayed as an independent woman with no male authority figure in her life, while María, after the death of her first husband, marries a Spaniard and active member of the Communist Party who

appears to be manipulating both women. Verónica continually struggles with the many options presented to her by her male counterparts until the final act of the play when she takes decisive action; María enacts a more passive role while trying, unsuccessfully, to appease all those involved in the conspiracy, including the police, Verónica, and her husband. And finally, the two represent opposing political views: María is a communist (whether due to her own volition or pressures from her husband is uncertain), while Verónica makes it very clear that she is not. In the following excerpt, Verónica reveals her perceptiveness of the political ideology of the movement, despite Echaury's attempt to discount her ideas:

ECHAURI. Volviendo al tema, tu hipótesis me resulta demente.

VERONICA. ¿Demente? Es la táctica comunista. Es decir: leninista. Van a matar a Matarazo, a Sócrates, para que no hable, y a mí, y el culpable va a resultar el gobierno.

ECHAURI. ¡Qué manera tan extraña de razonar!

VERONICA. En términos marxistas-leninistas, eso se llama la manipulación de las masas. ¿Quién va a sospechar de ellos? El culpable es el gobierno. Necesitan la sangre de Matarazo para politizar al pueblo. (Garro 2003, 52)

Verónica repeatedly voices her political ideology and demonstrates an astuteness that is not evidenced in the other female roles. As the voice of Garro, Verónica champions herself as a bourgeois woman and civil rights activist with a strong anticommunist ideology.

In expressing her political philosophy, Verónica finds herself confronting a machista ideology that does not value the opinion of women. Her comment cited above and many others scattered throughout the play clearly demonstrate that she has a strong political voice; yet, in the end, she is categorized as a crazy person—una “loca” (77)—with a persecution complex—“una persona que sufre delirio de persecución” (109). In the final act of the play, the police brazenly announce to María that Verónica and her daughter are no longer needed: “Las instrucciones del señor director son que si la molestan mucho las eche usted a la calle. Ya sabe lo que necesitaba saber y no le interesa la señora Verónica” (76). Once again, they classify Verónica as crazy: “¿a quién le puede interesar una loca?” (76). Shoshana Felman (1975) explains in “Women and Madness” that “woman is ‘madness’ to the extent that she is Other, *different* from man. . . . What the narcissistic economy of the Masculine universal equivalent tries to eliminate, under the label of ‘madness,’ is nothing other than *feminine difference*” (8; original emphasis). In Garro's play, when the officials label Verónica as “mad,” they are defining her *feminine difference*. Consequently, this characterization of Verónica as delirious and *loca* (i.e., nonmasculine) provides officials with the means to rob her of her voice and her political opinion—in effect,

with the means to silence her. Then, she is objectified and merely discarded as an item that has served its purpose and is no longer needed. The designated labeling of women as Other, as *feminine difference*, effectively silences Verónica and discounts both her political astuteness and political opinions as nothing more than the ravings of a delirious female.

Interestingly, the two protagonists in *Sócrates y los gatos* are females, and both are categorized as *loca* by the end of the drama. In the final scene, María, who has been vacillating between loyalty to her husband and loyalty to Veronica’s family, hears voices speaking to her, including that of Verónica, whose whereabouts are unknown at this point: “VERONICA. Estamos en el espejo, Marichu, en el espejo” (111). According to the stage directions, when María looks in the mirror, she sees several family members, both past and present, posing for a family photograph: “María se vuelve al espejo y dentro ve a Verónica sonriendo, en traje de viaje, con Humitos y Juan Lanás vivos, en brazos . . . De pronto Boni se coloca junto a Verónica y sonríe, como para una instantánea, y sale por la izquierda del espejo. Vuelve con Amalina y todos se colocan para una fotografía familiar” (111).

Characteristic of Garro’s dramatic style, this surrealist element, combined with a mysterious past concerning the deaths of several family members in a back room, marks María as another delirious female in the play. Unlike Verónica, however, the labeling of María as *loca* is associated with the personal storyline and not the political one. Verónica, an intelligent and outspoken political dissident and activist, is marked as delirious and disposable once she no longer serves any purpose for a male-dominated political conspiracy. María’s stigmatization as mad stems from her own personal experiences and perhaps a guilty conscience for a nefarious act purportedly committed in the past. Both female protagonists are labeled as mad and, in the process, their political ideologies and theories, sagacity, and even their compassion are disregarded by other characters as merely *feminine difference*—a gendered difference that is devalued by a predominantly machista-dominated society. Nonetheless, I would argue that despite being labeled as *loca*, Verónica’s political ideology and her positionality disrupt a largely male-centric narrative on Mexico’s 68 social movements. Her brazen opinions serve to defy established hierarchical understandings of social and political activism, including who can participate and whose contributions matter.

Pilar Campesino’s *Octubre terminó hace mucho tiempo*

Pilar Campesino’s *Octubre terminó hace mucho tiempo* was set to premiere at the Teatro Ofelia in 1970, a mere two years following the October 2 massacre, but the work was abruptly censored by Mexican officials, and the staging was canceled. The play included highly critical references to Mexican government officials through

symbolic images that audiences in Mexico would unmistakably recognize, such as officials being compared to gorillas and white rags wrapped around the right hand to represent the distinctive white glove worn by military and secret service personnel.⁸ Olga Harmony rightly notes the complexities involved in staging Campesino's work, along with her personal commentary concerning government censorship during this period:

En 1970 su estreno fue vetado por la censura (esa que se supone no existe, pero que acude puntual y fantasmagórica a supervisar los ensayos generales antes de otorgar el *nihil obstat*, aunque hay que reconocer que ahora es mucho más flexible que hace veinte años) cuando ya todo estaba listo para su estreno en el teatro Ofelia. La autora la estrenó en Nueva York al año siguiente y con posteridad en México, en 1974, ya sin mayores problemas, puesto que el echeverriato tenía gran necesidad de justificarse, sobre todo entre los círculos artísticos e intelectuales, demostrando que en el país existía plena libertad de expresión. (Harmony 1992, 89–90)

Ronald Burgess notices a central theme of violence in Campesino's work, suggesting another possible reason for the shutdown of *Octubre terminó*: "Her characters seem to embody the hatred and violence of 1968" (1991, 32). Most certainly Campesino's piece *Verano negro* (first produced in 1968) unabashedly criticizes racial constructions based on white hegemonic privilege and includes several violent scenes between white and black characters. *Octubre terminó* was not produced for a Mexican audience until 1974, four years after the censorship of the initial production, and it eventually became Campesino's most successful work with more than 100 performances.

Set in a modest but deteriorating apartment in Mexico, *Octubre terminó* dramatizes the personal relationship between a young couple involved in the social movements of the time including, as the title suggests, the October 2 events at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas. As Harmony and Carla Olson Buck note in their analyses of Campesino's work, *Octubre terminó* is a two-character play where role-playing and other games signal the absurdity of the present situation, like the Theater of the Absurd as exemplified in works by José Triana, *La noche de los asesinos*, and Jorge Díaz, *El cepillo de dientes*, among others (Harmony 1991, 90; Olson Buck 1998, 60). In their primary roles the female character, Elena, is a magazine writer, and her partner, Mario, a university professor. Both are involved, albeit on different levels, in social movements.

⁸ Carey's study, *Plaza of Sacrifices* (2005), includes images of student propaganda in which government and police officials are portrayed as gorillas.

Throughout the two-act play, they engage in dialogue concerning their political opinions and personal relationship; interspersed among these interchanges are diverse scenarios where the characters enact different roles, such as psychologist and patient, or torturer and victim.⁹ The dual planes in this play serve two purposes: first, they underscore the "personal relationship between Mario and Elena, and the student movement versus the establishment" (Olson Buck 1998, 64), and, second, they serve as a platform for the dramatist to question concepts of gender liberation in Mexico's social movements, a point that will be discussed in greater detail later in this study.

As in Garro's work, Campesino's play addresses the role of women in society, including the complex interplay between personal relationships and political commitment. In *Octubre terminó*, Elena is a young, twenty-two-year-old writer from an upper-class family who appears unsettled in the opening scene, as if she were waiting for something to happen. Mario is clearly content to remain in bed and immerse himself in his scholarly readings. Their relationship from the onset appears to be gender-specific: she worries about arriving on time at the in-laws and is distressed when ashes from the cigarette Mario is smoking in bed carelessly fall on the bedsheet; he merely wants to continue reading his political texts and not be disturbed. When Elena announces that she is expecting a child, and Mario replies with "¡Un chavo!" (15), the audience can assume to be witnessing a conventional young couple settling into a proverbial married life. This image, however, is precipitously shattered when Elena begins to question the efficacy of Mexico's 68 social movements, effectively contradicting Mario's opinion on the matter:

ELENA. El movimiento fracasó, Mario.

MARIO. ¡Fracasó, tu abuela! Cuatro meses de represión y masacre debían bastarte para/

ELENA. ¿Para qué? ¿Qué caso tiene hablar y hablar de reformas radicales, de violencia instituida, de lucha a muerte, de irresponsabilidad política, de dignidad humana, etcétera, etcétera, etcétera, cuando los arranques de rebeldía no se orientan contra el podrido sistema en el que estamos hundidos, Mario? (17)

Like Verónica in *Sócrates y los gatos*, who is an undeniably outspoken woman, Elena's cynical remarks imply some unsolicited truth. Elena accuses the leaders of the movement of not taking decisive action, analogous to Mario who only wishes to remain in bed reading. Eventually, their argument reaches a climax, at which point

⁹ In "Power Plays," Olson Buck (1998) analyzes the use of games and role-playing in three dramatic works by Campesino including *Octubre terminó*.

Mario decides to demonstrate his superiority in their personal relationship by slapping Elena and then lighting a cannabis cigarette, something that Elena clearly dislikes. The stage directions explain the action as follows: "Elena, muda, lo mira jugar cínicamente con el cigarro de mariguana. Mario, para demostrarle su superioridad, se lo lleva a los labios, enciende un cerillo y acerca provocativo la flama hasta la punta del cigarro, a pesar de saberse intensamente despreciado. Lo enciende" (19).

As Act One progresses, the couple transitions from a discussion about the student movements to a series of role-playing scenarios. In each, Elena portrays a number of female roles, such as therapist, author of a romance novel, servant in a household where her employer tries to sexually accost her, and abnegated mother. Olson Buck remarks that the couple's role-play and games "allow Mario and Elena to subtly criticize the regime and the socio-political situation of the time" (1998, 63). Nonetheless, I would add that Campesino's choice to depict Elena in conventional female roles offers another level of critique of gender identity formation and cultural ideology. In the first role-playing scene, Elena portrays a trendy romance novel author who is invited to read from her latest publication as part of a government-sponsored cultural event in honor of the Olympic Games. This rather serious event, where Elena was elected to represent "high" Mexican culture, instead turns into an exaggerated, kitschy presentation. In the following excerpt, Elena (as the author) reads from her latest novel with the seemingly cliché title, *Pasiones borrascosas*:¹⁰

ELENA. (Filtrándosele) "Unos ojos acerados la inquietaban . . ." Tres puntos. (Especifica) Me tomo la libertad de leer en voz alta ciertos signos ortográficos para que puedan captar el matiz de suspenso, clave de la narrativa moderna. En lo personal, me preocupa sobremanera interesar al lector, y qué más válido que los aparentemente insignificantes puntos suspensivos para lograr mi propósito. (21-22)

Elena's recitation of the novel, including the "puntos suspensivos," is not only a critique of the public display of normality in comparison to the disorder of the student movements but also highlights a male-centered ideology that views women's cultural contributions as banal, insignificant, and produced within a context of romance and sexuality where women are often portrayed as objects of desire. In this example, Campesino criticizes the Mexican government and exposes a machista attitude toward women; rather than invite to their cultural event a scholarly female writer, they instead designate an author of a prescriptive romance novel.

¹⁰ The title translates into *Wuthering Passions*, an overt reference to the idyllic romantic and gothic fiction novel *Wuthering Heights* (*Cumbres borrascosas*) by Emily Brontë.

In another scene, Elena plays the conventional role of a self-sacrificing mother. When she is asked her opinion on the student movement, she appears to struggle with how to respond:

MARIO. Usted, amante y abnegada madre de familia, tiene todo el derecho a emitir su opinión con respecto al presente movimiento estudiantil.

ELENA. ¿Mi opinión?

MARIO. Es importante.

ELENA. La verdad es que no sé . . . Tengo tan poco tiempo para . . .

(31)

During this role-play, Elena is unable to provide her opinion on an important political moment occurring in her country. These various simulated role-playing scenes serve to criticize a male-centered society that views women in scripted social roles where they enact anticipated and socially accepted norms and have no meaningful contribution to society or formidable political opinion. The gender roles are exaggerated simulations that emphasize the extent to which they have become conventionally accepted social scripts in society. In her criticism of the response to the social movements of the time, Campesino cleverly challenges socially accepted gender roles that are embedded in a machista society.

From the opening scene of Act Two, Elena appears to be taking more decisive action toward the social movements and the importance of her gendered perspective. Unlike the opening act, where she was clearly agitated and more preoccupied with conventional household duties, in the second act her political voice becomes more assertive. Whereas earlier in the play Elena proclaims, "Hay un montón de cosas que no entiendo" (19), in the second act, a more informed Elena shares her uncensored opinion on the social movements, including her openly cynical reaction to the government's inaccurate depiction of the repression of the student demonstrations by military force.

In her recently drafted article, she ironically references the government's official reporting of the total dead as "none": "El ejército toma Ciudad Universitaria y se posesiona del Casco de Santo Tomás, tras largas horas de batalla campal entre estudiantes y cuerpos policíacos. ¿Muertos? "Ninguno" (36). It is also through Elena and not Mario that we learn of the massacre on October 2. While Elena is reading from her article, Mario appears to be relatively nervous; the second she finishes, he begins to panic and rushes to hide all their political material scattered about the room. Elena starts to panic as well but then abruptly stops. At this point, Elena begins to take a stand both personally and politically:

MARIO. ¡Rápido, Elena! ¡Muévete! ¡Tenemos que esconder todo esto! [. . .]

(Elena, como sacudida, limpia de papeles el escritorio y esconde la máquina. De pronto, sin embargo, vuelve a quedarse inmóvil).

ELENA. Es inútil, Mario. Se acabó.

MARIO. (Fuera de sí) ¡Cierra el hocico, no seas pendeja!

ELENA. (Lastimada) No, Mario, así no. Si tienes algo de qué avergonzarte, no lo remediarás humillándome. (36)

By embodying a more active female role, Elena struggles to present herself, like Verónica in Garro's play, as an informed political activist whose opinions matter and whose contributions are a necessary part of social change in Mexico. Although hurt by Mario's remarks, Elena begins to take a stand against his treatment of her as an uninformed female whose opinions are insignificant because they do not coincide with his.

Throughout the second act, Elena progressively demonstrates more aggressive behavior toward Mario—yet another indication that she is challenging gender representation and the sexual oppression of women. As one example, when Mario comments that he is hungry, Elena obligingly brings him crackers smothered with honey and a glass of milk. Elena then begins to feed him the snack in an endearing and motherly way until rather unexpectedly he realizes that she is forcing the food into his mouth in an aggressive manner. Before Mario has a chance to swallow the previous bite, Elena forces more food and milk into his mouth until he nearly chokes on the crackers as the milk spills down his chin. This abnormal and rather violent behavior, clearly mimicking the torture of prisoners, likewise proposes a power struggle that challenges an accepted gendered social order. Instead of behaving like an endearing partner or mother, Elena enacts a role that does not coincide with her gender, one that is potentially subversive and perhaps viewed as negative in relation to a traditionally sanctioned patriarchal structure. In effect, she takes on a decidedly masculine role of torturer. Immediately following this scene, she attempts, unsuccessfully at first, to seduce Mario:

(Se aprieta suavemente contra él.)

MARIO. (Resistiéndose) Es pecado.

ELENA. ¡Moral! (Mario, en un juego de estira y afloja, se da a desear. Sus cuerpos se restriegan sensualmente.) No seas bobo. El amor no reconoce sexos ni es pecado puesto que se lleva como la sangre. Ponerle trabas es ir contra natura.

MARIO. Es una porquería. (48)

Elena appears to be fully aware of the power she wields over Mario when it comes to sexual activity, and Mario, who cannot resist her advances, eventually joins her in the shower. While this power exchange occurs, Mario projects onto some bedsheets a film about the student movements and leaves it running for the audience to view while he joins Elena in the shower. Olson Buck rightly notes that "the juxtaposition of images [film and sexual activity in the shower] demonstrates graphically that the movement has permeated their lives and their political and personal identities are inexorably joined" (1998, 65). It cannot go unnoticed, however, that their personal and political identities are interspersed with gendered subjectivities. Rather than perpetuate established social relations where women are depicted as chaste, nonsexual, and nonaggressive, Elena becomes the aggressor and is unapologetic about her sexual relations.

Any changes to Mexico's sociopolitical system may need to consider, as this play proposes, micropolitical practices and marginalized discourses, including gender-inscribed ones. Just as the couple is not able to unravel political ideologies from their personal relationship, they are also unable to disentangle the social movements from a concept of gender equity. To emphasize this point, the concept of freedom is debated several times in *Octubre terminó* and often within the context of both male-dominated political ideologies and historically inscribed gender roles. The first reference to freedom appears in Act One when Elena and Mario are examining what appears to be stagnation within the movements. Mario, who remains faithful to movement ideologies, remarks that "ser revolucionario es estar libre de prejuicios" to which Elena replies, "¡Yo no soy libre!" (18). In this first reference to freedom, we witness Elena questioning her own independence both as a political activist and as a woman. The next two references to freedom clearly imply that there are limitations to concepts of liberty within political discourses that consider women an attribute or property of the male.

In the following scene, Mario and Elena are role-playing Elena's grandfather and a younger Elena, when Mario breaks from the game and asks Elena what it means to know freedom:

MARIO. (Olvidando el juego) Digamos que significa saberse libre.

ELENA. Alguna vez pensó usted irse de guerrillero, ¿no es cierto?

MARIO. ¿Te habrías ido tú conmigo?

ELENA. ¿Para saberme libre?

MARIO. Para estar a mi lado. (45)

For Elena, joining Mario as a guerrilla would provide her with a chance to be free or, at the very least, to witness freedom. Mario's response, however, reminds Elena that her gender-inscribed role would be to remain by his side as the supportive female.

In a later scene, Elena once again questions paradoxical concepts of freedom as applicable to sociopolitical movements and not to gender. Her subjectivity remains not an individual perception but rather a cultural representation where historically inscribed female roles such as a woman's "place" and "freedom" are determined by males: "ELENA. Mi lugar está contigo; mi libertad te pertenece" (50).

In the final reference to liberty near the end of Act Two, Elena has become a more outspoken female who appears to be searching for her place in a social movement that does not necessarily coincide with her personal relationship with Mario. During another intense quarrel about their partnership, Elena threatens to leave Mario and comments in an arguably double entendre manner, "Si pudiera ser como tú" (51). Is Elena remarking that she would like to be more like Mario as an activist, or Mario as a male, or perhaps both? To reconcile their relationship, Mario offers Elena the following compromise:

MARIO. Y yo voy a darte algo más todavía. Voy a darte la oportunidad de vencerme.

ELENA. (Sin comprender) ¿De vencerte?

MARIO. Yo también tengo cadenas que romper.

ELENA. (Gritando) ¡Compañeros: el momento de la liberación ha llegado! ¡Ningún crimen quedará impune! ¡Muerte al opresor! ¡Muerte al fascismo! ¡Abajo la dictadura!

MARIO. ¡Cállate!

ELENA. ¡Despierta, pueblo; la calle es tuya!

MARIO. (Sacudiéndola) ¡Que te calles, te digo! ¡No sabes lo que dices!

ELENA. ¡Abajo el imperialismo! ¡Viva la libertad! ¡Viva la libertad! (51)

Although clearly a reference to the student movement drive to discredit the authoritarian PRI party, Elena's comments also appear to address constructed gender roles within an institutionalized discourse on politics and social meaning. When Mario offers her the opportunity to break his chains or his bondages—whatever they might be—Elena replies with "¡Muerte al opresor!" and "¡Viva la libertad!" (51). Her comments suggest a need to understand the female subject within a narrative of social change and institutional practices. Any concept of "freedom" within political discourses must (re)examine meanings of gender and sociocultural practices that continue to oppress female subjectivity and gendered self-representation. Personal identity is gender specific and appears to be inseparable from political ideologies.¹¹

¹¹ For additional readings on women's contributions to Mexico's 68 social movements, see Macrina Cárdenas Montaña, "La participación de las mujeres en los movimientos armados" (2006) and Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen, eds., *Gender and Sexuality in 1968* (2009).

Does the liberation desired and defined by Mexico's 68 social movements include liberation from historically inscribed and scripted gender roles? This question is left unanswered by the ambiguous ending to Campesino's play. In a reenactment of the October 2 massacre, Mario is assassinated, and his body falls on stage. Symbolic of an agonizing female who wishes to protect a deceased loved one, Elena covers Mario's body with her own, as indicated by the stage directions: "Elena lo cubre con su cuerpo. La soledad la invade, experimentada en forma de infinito vacío" (53). This gesture suggests that Elena loved Mario, yet audiences must question whether this is another game, a simulacrum of the October 2 massacre. This final act "blurs the distinction between reality and play" (Olson Buck 1998, 66) and, furthermore, emphasizes Mario and Elena's gender roles as historically scripted, repeated, and most likely, unchallenged.

In her study of Campesino's drama *Super Ocho*, Judith Bissett reminds us that "es necesario, al examinar acontecimientos y corrientes históricas, destacar el papel de la mujer, y las consecuencias de sus actividades, para entender su propia historia dentro de la historia oficial y el verdadero significado de su presencia" (1999, 47). In *Octubre terminó*, Campesino is unmistakably criticizing (and rather openly, hence the reason for its censure in 1970) the PRI's authoritarian regime and government-sponsored violence in Mexico. Interlaced within this highly political criticism is a questioning of women's experiences within the social movements, one that informs a reconceptualization of freedom and gender discourses. Campesino's drama reminds audiences that a reordering of power relations depends on multiple points of resistance and should include a reformulation of gender subjectivity and women's roles.

Conclusions

Like Verónica in Garro's play, Campesino's Elena ultimately finds her voice and effectively expresses her opinion. In *Sócrates y los gatos*, however, Verónica is categorized in the end as delirious and mad, while Elena in *Octubre terminó* is not, despite the "absurd" moments in the play such as when she attempts to skate on newspapers across the stage and when she pretends to escape in a motorboat. These anomalous scenes, typical of two-character plays of absurdist theater, point to the irrationality of reality and the pessimism and hopelessness of Mexico's static political history steeped in Mexican Revolution rhetoric. Garro's drama remains faithful to a realistic account of an impactful time in her and her daughter's lives.

While the two approaches appear to be converse, in that one reminds us of the absurdity of reality, and the other of the importance of what is real and tangible, the playwrights' feminist positions address a hegemonic understanding of politics and social movements that has historically been defined as predominantly male. This

interpretation serves to remind us of what is understandable and necessary: the acceptance of women's contributions and approaches to a very masculine political ideology. Not only did the 68 movements and social mobilization impact individual lives, but they also contributed to feminist thought and activism in Mexico (the second wave of Mexican feminism in the 1970s) and to a distinctive understanding of youth culture and social class in a markedly hierarchical and gendered society.

It is essential to include women's political and social perspectives in processes seeking to uncloak a mythos of male agency and female disenfranchisement. Any recognition of women as political equals with important contributions to the political state has the potential to challenge long-standing machista attitudes and gender-inscribed roles sanctioned by formulaic macho paradigms. Garro's and Campesino's plays expose a sociocultural system in Mexico steeped in male rights and privileges. In response to this system, their works compel audiences to embrace gendered experiences as dynamic and necessary for promoting palpable social and political change. Their plays are a significant contribution to the repertoire of Tlatelolco literature and serve to remind audiences of a pivotal time in Mexico that impacted numerous women who provided leadership and perceptiveness to the events.

Linda Saborío is Associate Professor of Spanish and Assistant Chair in the Department of World Languages and Cultures at Northern Illinois University. She also serves as her institution's representative on the Faculty Advisory Council to the Illinois Board of Higher Education. Her research broadly examines theatrical works by Latina and Mexican dramatists with a theoretical lens on the intersections of gender, social class, and ethnicity. Her most recent project centers on the creation of an all-female mariachi band in the staged production of *American Mariachi* by José Cruz González. Her book, *Embodying Difference: Scripting Social Images of the Female Body in Latina Theatre* (2012) explores contemporary theatrical productions by Latina dramatists in the United States and analyzes the effects on Latinas of neoliberal politics, global market strategies, gender formation, and racial and ethnic marginalization. She has published articles in such journals as *Latin American Theatre Review*, *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, and *Hispanic Journal*. Linda earned her BA in Spanish and Comparative Literature at the University of California-Irvine, and her MA and PhD in Spanish and Latin American Literature from the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

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