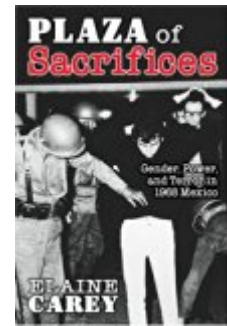


Elaine Carey. *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005. 240 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8263-3545-6.

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Repression and Resistance: Examining Mexico's Tlatelolco Massacre through a Gendered Lens

The 1968 Tlatelolco student massacre has been a topic of scholarly inquiry ever since the fateful day when hundreds of Mexican students lost their lives at the hands of Mexican troops. However, over the past ten years there has been resurgence in interest which has produced fascinating cultural and social analyses. *Plaza of Sacrifices, Gender, Power and Terror in 1968 Mexico* by Elaine Carey builds on this research by approaching the student movement and tragedy through a gendered lens. The book skillfully traces the events that led to the student massacre while addressing the centrality of gender and masculinity as vital components of the student-led movement. Carey conveys the story with the eloquence of a suspenseful novel where all students of Mexican history know the outcome. The book fills in the blanks of this tragic story with the voices of the participants, bringing to life the students who struggled for their vision of the Mexican Revolution.

Carey begins with the social relationships that dominated Mexico following its tumultuous revolution (1910-20). She traces Mexico's evolution to an authoritarian and paternalist single-party system under the leader of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) which co-opted unions and quashed political resistance. By the 1950s, cracks were appearing in the PRI's well-ordered system. The promises of the Revolution gave way to labor strikes led by railway, electrical, and telephone workers whose real wages had declined. By 1959, the situation had escalated. Railway workers not only demanded higher wages, they also pushed for greater union democ-

racy.[1] The state's repression of the strikers coupled with imprisonment of political activists informed the student movement of 1968. Reflecting upon the repression of workers and leftist opposition parties, Carey quotes student leader and activist Gilberto Guevara Niebla; "It was in this vacuum, that the students injected their demands, aspirations, and desires that were not exclusively of student interest, but also of interest to the campesinos, workers, intellectuals and political parties, etc" (p. 29). However, it was the state's intervention on July 22, 1968 in a street fight between high school students that galvanized the movement. During the unrest, the army used deadly force, leaving dozens of students dead following the army's seizure of the National Polytechnic Institute in Mexico City.

Following the confrontation, the movement grew quickly under the student leadership of the National Strike Council (CNH). Teachers, some staff members, parents, and petroleum, railroad, and electrical workers also joined the students, making the uprising more complicated than officials had previously thought. The protest became a national blemish on the face of the PRI's long self-adulated stability and order on the eve of the 1968 Olympics. As a result, Mexican officials led by President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz, portrayed the agitators as communist sympathizers who yearned for social disorder. These tactics had tragic consequences. For example, a group of students fearing for their lives in the small community of San Miguel de Canoa hid in the home of a sympathizer. The state's propaganda machine had so

effectively stirred the nation against perceived threats of communism and anti-Catholicism that residents in this rural town were moved to hang the student activists as well as the owner of the hovel who sheltered them. Stories such as these bring the horror of the repression to life and demonstrate the perversity of Mexican authorities during this tumultuous period. The confrontation came to a tragic end on October 2, 1968 (ten days before the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games). While the details of various accounts conflict, soldiers descended on about five thousand protesters in the Plaza of the Three Cultures in the Tlatelolco district where they shot and killed hundreds of students, although the “official” death toll is far fewer.

Rather than simply recounting the events that led to the massacre, Carey also explores how the movement empowered women. While male students assigned female activists duties associated with their gender, women pushed back and “ruptured circumscribed gendered social expectations” (p. 82). Therefore, despite resistance to women’s active roles in the protest (often by parents as well), the uprising created a space for women to take on roles previously assigned to men. This was not easy. As Carey points out, the students’ challenge to the PRI’s paternal authority occurred within an international climate of protest and social revolution which affirmed rather than challenged masculinity. Revolutionary leaders such as Che Guevara became icons for many of the student leaders. Guevara and the example of the Cuban revolution underscored the masculinity of the bearded revolutionaries, which resonated with Mexican male students struggling against a corrupt and repressive regime. Cuba’s example also dovetailed with women’s increased participation in politics and social movements throughout Latin America, creating tension within the social movements between men and women. Mexico’s student movement, masculine in nature, was nonetheless informed by middle-class women who sought to interject their own vision of Mexican society. Women confronted paternalism and patriarchy not only from their parents, but from their male student counterparts. Regardless, many of the women in Carey’s story persevered. Perhaps most notably, groups such as the National Union of Mexican Women capitalized on the student struggle by underscoring their roles as mothers, sisters, and wives to condemn the actions of male Mexican officials. Clearly such strategies were also employed in nations such as Argentina during the Dirty War and in Chile under Augusto Pinochet; examples that Carey could have included to contextualize women’s organization in Mexico.

Following the tragic outcome of the student demonstrations, women built upon the roles they had developed during the demonstrations. Female students became active in Mexico’s feminist movement while also calling attention to the state-led brutality under the direction of newly elected president Luis Echeverria (1970-76). Echeverria co-opted many of those who participated in the anti-government movement of 1968, while repressing those he could not.

Plaza of Sacrifices is a welcome addition to the historiography of this tragic event. Carey brings this salient movement to life by capturing the thoughts and fears of those who challenged state authority. To her credit, Carey situates the 1968 movement within the international context of Cuba’s revolution, Cold War politics, and student movements in France and the United States. Yet, her gendered analysis could have been richer had she engaged with scholars such as Rita Arditi, Temma Kaplan, Heidi Tinsman, and Diana Taylor, who have explored women’s strategies in resisting state sponsored terrorism.[2] Carey also mentions that there were divisions among students as to the level of radicalization. This point warrants greater explanation. Were the women also divided? If so, why? Regardless of these minor shortcomings, Carey’s book fills a void in the historiography of the Tlatelolco Massacre. In addition, the use of oral history and the clarity of her prose, unencumbered by excessive theoretical analysis, makes the book an ideal choice for undergraduates.

Notes

[1]. Donald Hodges and Ross Gandy, *Mexico Under Siege, Popular Resistance to Despotism* (New York: Zed Books, 2002). Also see Jeffrey Gould, “Solidarity Under Siege: The Latin American Left, 1969,” *The American Historical Review* (*AHR Forum*)114, no. 2 (2009): 348-375.

[2]. See the following: Temma Kaplan, *Taking Back the Streets: Women, Youth and Direct Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Rita Arditi, *Searching for Life: The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Disappeared Children of Argentina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950-1973* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); and Diana Taylor *Disappearing Acts, Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty War”* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

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