

Violence, Sex, and Resistance:

Mexico City and Masculinity in Armando Ramírez's *Violación en Polanco*

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Armando Ramírez's 1979 novel *Violación en Polanco* [*Rape in Polanco*] tells the story of a trio of lower-class men who kidnap, abuse, and murder an upper-class woman in Mexico City. Ramírez's novel suggests that the actions of the lower-class men are forms of resistance against the modernizing project that has excluded them from its benefits. Although the plot of the novel concerns a brutal and prolonged kidnapping and rape, the novel is as much about modern Mexico City as it is about violence. Violence is used as a mediator between the physical city and the experiences of the characters, and is the only form of interaction between the upper- and lower-classes. In his description of masculine identity, Ramírez focuses on violent interactions between the men expressed through sexual acts and travel through the city. Travel itself, through the nocturnal city, is shaped and structured by violence, giving the reader an understanding of the city through its very violence. Ramírez's writing is marketed as a "real" vision of Mexico City; however, his portrayal exploits existing stereotypes about the upper- and lower-classes.

In *Violación en Polanco* (1979),¹ a group of lower-class men drive around Mexico City in a stolen bus while brutally abusing and eventually murdering a kidnapped upper-class woman. They commit this crime because they hold the woman's wealthy husband responsible for the death of two friends of the men – a female prostitute named Chuy and "La Taylor," a

transgendered prostitute who is referred both as a he and she. Since the husband is also dead, the men's revenge is a symbolic act against the upper-classes. The novel alternates between this act and the musings of the narrator (one of the men) in a sleazy Mexico City movie house.

Armando Ramírez is one of Mexico's foremost pulp novelists. He has written over 30 novels and short story collections, which remain in print in Mexico. Ramírez was born in 1951 and began writing in the 1970's. His writing echoes the social concerns of the era and helps inaugurate contemporary Mexico City *costumbrista* literature [folkloric literature that focuses on the experiences and exploits of the lower-classes]. His most famous novel, *Chin Chin el Teporocho* [*Chin Chin, the Lush*] (1972), was adapted for a film by director Gabriel Retes in 1975. The film is considered one of the most important films of the era. Nevertheless, Armando Ramírez's work is not considered "literature" in the Mexican literary scene, although his work is very influential in Mexico City. For example, the supplement of Mexico City's well-known left-wing newspaper *La Jornada*, is named "Masiosare" in honor of a character in the Ramírez novel *¡Pantaletas!* [*Panties!*] (2001).

The marketing of Ramírez asserts that his perspective is unique because it accurately portrays the urban lower-class experience. Like other Mexico City *costumbrista* writers of his generation, Ramírez chooses to portray the lives of the allegedly "forgotten" lower-classes. The works of these writers are supposedly crafted in direct contrast to the "high literature" of Mexico that traditionally focused on the upper- and middle-classes.

¹ The novel was first published in 1977 as *Pu*, but the subsequent 1979 edition uses the more descriptive title *Violación en Polanco*. The title *Pu* refers to a line from the series of stream of consciousness passages featured at the end of the novel.

Although few academic studies exist of Ramírez's work, those studies concur uncritically with the marketing of Ramírez's work. Most of these works (articles and dissertations predominantly) tend to focus on Ramírez's portrayal of Mexico City or his use of colloquial language and folklore. The Modern Language Association database currently lists four articles examining *Violación en Polanco* exclusively. M. Isela Chiu-Olivares' 1988 article in *Chasqui* focuses on Ramírez's narrative technique in the novel; Valentina Pabello de Mickey's 1990 article in *La Palabra y el Hombre* focuses on Ramírez's use of colloquial Spanish; Carol Clark D'Lugo's article from 2001 in *Chasqui* focuses on the novel's portrayal of violence and its use of film to present race and class conflicts; and Felipe Montoya Landaverde's 2004 article in *Céfiro* focuses on the portrayal of indigenous Mexicans and violence in the novel and includes an interview with Ramírez. The first two articles and Montoya Landaverde's are representative of the majority of the academic work about Ramírez's novels given their focus on narrative and colloquial language. D'Lugo's article, on the other hand, presents a fascinating reading of the novel as an attempt to give voice to the lower-classes. D'Lugo presents her analysis on the novel through Ramírez's use of film as a narrative technique and by focusing on the structure of the novel as it fluctuates between the murder and the scenes at the movie theater.

This article on *Violación en Polanco* differs from previous works on the novel primarily through my argument about the narrative's overt manipulation of discourse and imagery to portray an imaged lower-class masculine resistance to the modernizing project. I argue that such a resistance is ultimately disconnected from actual contemporary struggles for social justice in Mexico City. Moreover, Ramírez's location of the narrative in two of Mexico City's most iconic neighborhoods positions his story within a greater and unoriginal narrative about urban class tensions and imagined resistance. It is, of course, no accident that both of these neighborhoods,

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Tepito and Polanco, are not where the middle-class resides. Given the novel's complicated structure and use of elite literary techniques, *Violación en Polanco* in fact features conservative stereotypes about Mexico City class relations for the benefit of its imagined audience, the Mexican middle-class – who can comfortably enjoy the novel without their privileges being challenged. In the next two sections, I discuss Ramírez's use of Tepito and Polanco to create a class dichotomy in the novel.

Ramírez's Mexico City: Tepito, Polanco, and Melodrama

Most of the action involving the lower-class men in *Violación en Polanco* is set in Tepito, one of Mexico City's oldest neighborhoods, located north of the city center. Tepito features many markets and commercial activities, where many middle and lower-class people from all over the city do their shopping. During the Cristero war in the early twentieth century, many rural inhabitants from the central highlands of the Bajío settled in Tepito. Many of them were tradespeople who had worked in the shoe industry in the Bajío and brought their knowledge to the city. Tepito quickly became associated with shoemaking. In the 1970's, Tepito became the site where *fayuca* [slang for contraband, especially electronic goods] was traded. During that time, Mexican law limited the legal importation of foreign commodity goods; many entrepreneurs would bring merchandise from the United States and sell it illegally in markets throughout the country. Tepito's markets became one of the largest distributors of *fayuca* in Mexico City. Today, Tepito is still known for its commercial activities; markets and residents continue to have problems with the law over commercial rights. In the year 2002, several confrontations between the police and Tepito ambulant sellers erupted, during which sellers resisted the city's measures to limit their access to the streets. The matter remains unresolved.

Tepito is considered by middle and upper-class Mexico City inhabitants to be a dangerous place, inhabited by criminals and prostitutes. A good example of this can be found in the promotional materials for the B-movie *Los caifanes de Tepito* [*The caifanes from Tepito*] (2001). The film claims to

en carne propia la corrupción de parte de las autoridades, el bajo mundo de las drogas, la prostitución y la crueldad con la que se realizan asesinatos para lograr el poder de los territorios (sic).

[embody the government's corruption, the underground drug culture, prostitution, and the cruelty of those who murder to control gang territories.]

This type of description of Tepito is easily found in Mexican popular culture, adding to Tepito's image as a dangerous and unlawful area of Mexico City. It is ironic that a place that is supposedly backwards is actually a source for technological commodities.

The Tepito promotional materials by the Gobierno del Distrito Federal [Federal District Government] are very different. In the on-line feature "Vivir en...Tepito" ["To Live in ... Tepito"], Javier E. Pérez Maldonado writes about the *barrio* in different terms. He begins by saying,

Tepito es el barrio de la Ciudad de México que mejor ha resistido la embestida de la modernización urbana en cuanto a la implantación de nuevos patrones en sus costumbres, ya que ha conservado con gallardía y constante lucha su fisonomía y arraigada vocación comercial.

[Tepito is the Mexico City *barrio* that has best resisted the attacks of urban modernization by not transforming its traditions since it has bravely, and through constant struggle, conserved its physiognomy and long-established commercial vocation.]

Maldonado's prose suggests that Tepito's urban planning shortcomings are not a sign of underdevelopment, official corruption, or backwardness: they are in fact a form of resistance against globalization. His statement is politically correct in the age of *globophobia* [as anti-globalization movements are labeled in Mexico], but fails to address real necessities in the

barrio. Maldonado continues his piece by talking about the *barrio*'s historic beginnings during Aztec times and then rapidly switches to the twentieth-century. He briefly mentions *fayuca* in the context of the 1970's and quickly forgets the implications of such illegal trade.

Maldonado's piece attempts to present a positive picture of lower-class men in Tepito. He interviews some native Tepito inhabitants who tell of their struggles in the *barrio* – all with happy endings about overcoming odds through good moral decisions. Focusing primarily on men, who are referred to via their street nicknames, Maldonado here utilizes the elements of Mexican urban melodrama to tell their stories. A key element is the relationship between the humble lower-class peoples and their place of residence. In the essay, Tepito inhabitants love their native *barrio*. Films such as *¡Que Viva Tepito, Mi Barrio!* [*Viva Tepito, My Barrio!*] (1987) similarly present this opinion. In this film, Tepito inhabitants are portrayed as honest people who happen to live in a dangerous place. There is a contrast between the “good” Tepito people and the “bad” Tepito people. The “good” characters exemplify all the traditional characteristics associated with morality, while the underdeveloped “bad” characters are just plain evil. The “good” characters feel pride in their *barrio* and want to make it a better place for all of them to live. No one ever suggests that perhaps moving would be a good idea. They all – “good” and “bad” – are going to remain in Tepito. Just like *¡Que Viva Tepito, Mi Barrio!* derives its melodrama from the tradition set forth in Mexican Golden Age films, Armando Ramírez's novels about the *barrio* combine

Through the staging of most of his works in Tepito, Armando Ramírez creates the illusion that his writing is portraying the “reality” of his native Mexico City *barrio*. The novels of Ramírez add to stereotypes about Tepito by focusing on the criminals, prostitutes and *teporochos* [drunkards]. Ramírez complicates these stereotypes by adding depth and complexity

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to these imaginary Tepito inhabitants, although still choosing to portray them as “examples” of typical Tepito dwellers.

Violación en Polanco thus contrasts the “realities” of two important *barrios* in Mexico City – Tepito and Polanco. Polanco, like Tepito, also suffers (and benefits) from its reputation. Polanco, located south-west of the center of the City, is not often referred to as a *barrio* but rather as a *colonia*, which is a more affluent neighborhood. Polanco is also known for its commercial district, but this one features high-end galleries and boutiques. Polanco is portrayed in Mexican popular culture to signify the space of the rich. Today, the truly rich live somewhere else, but Polanco still maintains that reputation. It is the perfect contrast to Tepito.

The dichotomy created by the contrast of Tepito and Polanco calls forth many contradictory comparisons. Because Tepito is where the poor live and Polanco is where the rich live, moral judgment can be passed over the inhabitants. The most obvious one is between order and disorder. Tepito represents disorder, where the streets are dirty and the people are disheveled. Polanco is order, where the streets are clean and the people are mannered. Tepito is where evil lurks and Polanco is where goodness reigns. There is also an inverted set of comparisons. Tepito represents the site of the “true” experience – the *barrio* as the site of urban reality. Polanco represents the fake life of the upper-classes. The men from Tepito are representatives of positive and unrestrained masculinity, those from Polanco are not.

This classic and contradictory juxtaposition of the lower- and upper-class neighborhoods echoes Matthew C. Gutmann’s description of masculinity, class, and place in *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City* (1996). In his ethnographic study of a lower-class neighborhood of Mexico City, Gutmann chronicles how perceptions about a specific neighborhood and its inhabitants have gendered implications. On the one hand, the neighborhood

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of his study is seen by outsiders as “*un lugar feo* (an ugly place) where *los hombres malos* (the bad men) live” (36); on the other hand, this neighborhood is exactly where Gutmann conducts his study about what it means to be a man in contemporary Mexico. While Gutmann cautions his readers that the stereotypical *macho mexicano* is not how these men behave, he does implicitly ascertain through this study that everyday Mexican masculinity is constructed in such lower-class neighborhoods.

Other case studies about Latin American masculinity, most notably that of Argentina by Donna Guy and that of Peru by Marisol de la Cadena, also argue that lower- and upper-class tensions are expressed through the intersection of ideas about what it means to be a man and physical location within the city. Thus, there is a strong connection in the Latin American imaginary between social class, neighborhood identity, and gender performance. Most importantly, these tensions are often expressed through the dichotomy of order and disorder. The upper-classes are associated with a sterile order, while the lower-classes present the danger of disorder.

Armando Ramírez’s book suggests that disorder can in fact become a tool to potentially subvert social hierarchies. The lower-class men in the novel decide to utilize violence (the most destructive of disorders) to exact revenge on the upper-classes. This becomes a symbolic act of inter-class retribution that temporally awards the lower-class men with power. Their use of that power is to destroy that which they consider is dear to their upper-class enemy. The men’s revenge against the wealthy man is based on a simple exchange – he took away something from them so they must take away something that belongs to him. This solution, however, while giving the appearance of male empowerment, is in fact at the cost of women’s bodies and lives.

The Named and Unnamed

The novel contains several picturesque characters that hang around an old movie theatre in Mexico City. The main character loves films and is an aspiring screenwriter. His friends are the abusive Abigail² and Genovevo. Of all the characters, Genovevo appears to be the only one legally employed; he works as a bodyguard for a wealthy and corrupt government official. Chuy, Abigail's girlfriend, is a free-loving prostitute who has had sexual relations with all three men. She is a good friend of "La Taylor," another prostitute. "La Taylor" – named after the American actress Elizabeth Taylor – is a transgendered prostitute who causes much confusion for the narrator, who refers to the character both as a he and she throughout the novel. The other two minor characters who frequent the movie theatre are La Mati, a prostitute, and Rajita, a gay man who pays Abigail to have sexual relations with him. Along with these lower-class characters are a series of semi-anonymous upper-class characters who mostly remain nameless and featureless: Genovevo's boss and his family; Chuy's employer; and the woman victimized by the men throughout the novel, who is only referred to as "la señora" ["the Mrs.,"] or vulgarly as "la nalga" ["the buttocks"], in reference to her attractive behind.

In the novel, the lower-class characters possess a defined identity sharply contrasted to the undefined identity of the upper-class characters. This implies that the lower-class people are the real and main characters, and that the upper-class characters are mere representatives of their class. They are the stock characters that loom in the background as undefined menaces. This also

² For English-speaking audiences, the name of Abigail might cause some gender confusion. In Mexico, the name Abigail is traditionally a man's name, unlike in English, where it is a woman's name.

implies that neither class knows the other. The lower-class men are on first name basis with each other, and one supposes the upper-class men are also familiar with their fellow upper-class men.

The only character that might be able to bridge the class divide is Chuy. This is a stereotypical representation of the prostitute as one who transcends class barriers because her profession is instrumental in making the lower and upper-classes *hermanos de leche* [“milk brothers,” that is, the bond between the men who share a female sexual partner]. The brutal murder of Chuy might suggest that this spurious relation is not truly possible. The upper-classes destroy the representative of the lower-classes and therefore eliminate the only link between the two.

Gender Disorder

The novel offers a complex gender and sexuality subtext. The men repeatedly engage in sexual relations with other men, although they deny any gayness on their part. The character of “La Taylor” disturbs the narrator and other male characters, who feel sexually attracted and repulsed at the same time. The murder of “la señora” and the men’s relation to Chuy suggest that these men need to establish a bond as *hermanos de leche*, but also need to carry out this act in front of each other.

Abigail has sexual relations with several characters in the novel. He is involved with Chuy and also acts as her pimp. He manages other prostitutes, who are minor characters. Abigail also is paid to have sexual relations with a gay man named Rajita. The narrator says of this:

La Rajita era el maricón con el cual se acostaba el Abigail, de acostarse, no de coger, porque el Abigail dice que nunca hizo el sexo con La Rajita, que nada más lo dejaba que lo abrazara para dormirse (Ramírez 1979, 33-34)

[La Rajita was the faggot with whom Abigail slept; slept but not fucked, because Abigail told me that he never had sex with La Rajita, he just allowed [La Rajita] to hold him while they slept.]

The narrator casts doubt on Abigail's statement about his involvement with Rajita. After this passage, Rajita and Chuy have a "girlfight" over Abigail's attention. Abigail chooses to publicly tell Rajita off, although he continues to have relations with him. This is an important point given that Abigail feels the need to obscure his relation with Rajita from public knowledge. He tells his friends that he only "sleeps" – as in to share a bed – with Rajita. He publicly "breaks up" with Rajita. Yet, he continues to be involved.

The loosely established ground rules of who is gay and who is not create paranoia in the minds of the characters in *Violación en Polanco*, who fear the thought of being thought of as "abhorrent." Abigail wrestles continuously with these issues. His relationship with Rajita, as well as the actual physical presence of Rajita, represents a threat to Abigail's masculinity. Abigail's public break up with Rajita is intended for his male friends. Abigail feels the need to perform to his friends that he is a man, and in his mind, "real" men do not have public relationships with gays.

Abigail responds to all threats to his masculinity with violence against those he believes to be "weak" and hence feminine. Abigail decides to participate in the murder of "la señora" to protect his masculinity. This becomes a violent act that utilizes sex as a weapon and as a performance of normative gender identity. Throughout the novel, it is obvious that Abigail is not interested in Chuy's well being. After Chuy is murdered, the narrator and Genovevo are upset and instigate the murder of "la señora." Abigail goes along because the narrator convinces him that Abigail's pride has been wounded by the murder of Chuy.

Abigail's behavior suggests that masculinity for him is based on public actions performed for his male friends. Abigail constantly needs his friends' approval and validation of his masculinity. The friends similarly rely on Abigail to verify their masculinity. The "feminine" characters in the novel do not provide masculine validation, but proper control of and explicitly sexual relationships with these characters in the presence of other men do constitute masculine validation. Abigail needs to maintain a public image of proper masculinity for his friends and this extends to how he manages his "women." The narrator often questions Abigail's actions and these questions cause Abigail to modify his actions to better exhibit what his friends understand as proper masculine behavior.

In the novel, the men continuously have sex with anonymous women at the movie theatre while the other men watch and witness such acts. This behavior is also carried out during the kidnapping and rape of "la señora." This act is to be read in several ways. At a base level, the men are proving their sexual prowess to each other. They need an audience because these men need to prove their masculinity to each other publicly. The men's behavior however also hints other less obvious desires. The men's witnessing of each other's sexual acts also creates a bond between them.

The witnessing of each other's sexual acts is also a way of *having* sex with each other while still maintaining their masculinity. The men are attracted subconsciously to each other. During the kidnapping, the men continuously alternate positions and enjoy each one equally. One drives, one watches, and one abuses the woman. The one who drives also watches through the rear view mirror. By watching each other directly and through mirrors, each man imagines himself involved in the actions. The men's behavior in the novel is presented through the use of film. Chapters alternate between the kidnapping and the scenes at the movie theatre. The narrator

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continuously describes the actions on the screen – often focusing on those dealing with sexual situations – and then describes the actions of his buddies, narrating them in cinematic terms. It is no accident that the narrator is an aspiring screenwriter.

The actions of the men become like films, which denote a product to be consumed (and authorized) by a large audience. At the start of the kidnapping, Abigail asks the narrator, “¿cómo ves la película?, está bien hecha, no vaya a salir como esos pinches churros que veíamos, ¿te acuerdas? ¡Qué pechos!, los de Isela Vega, ¿verdad?” [“How’s the movie? It is well done; not like those low-budget Mexican films that we used to watch. Do you remember? Isela Vega had quite the boobs, no?”] (Ramírez 1979, 23) For Abigail, the proper performance of masculinity makes their actions good film material and not a low-budget Mexican film. He also feels compelled to compare the woman’s breasts to those of Isela Vega, a famous Mexican soft porn beauty. Mexican and Hollywood female actress are important sex objects, while male actors provide role models. Film is very important in this novel, and film stars even more so. The narrator has a fixation with female film stars from Mexican Golden Age and Hollywood films. The narrator actively desires these female stars in the same way he desires Chuy and “La Taylor.” At times, he refers to these two characters using the names of film stars.

Another performative aspect of masculinity in the novel is its relationship to feminine identity. In the novel, the “feminine” characters are not portrayed as wrestling with issues of proper gender identity. The novel implies that feminine characters rely on male characters to guide their identity. They do not experience any existential crises but do suffer the consequences of improper masculine actions. For example, Rajita is comfortable with his identity as a gay man. In Rajita’s mind, there is no doubt that Abigail and he are involved in a relationship. Hence, Rajita feels entitled to confront Chuy over Abigail – to see who wins the man. Rajita only backs

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off when Abigail chastises him and this causes Rajita to have a nervous breakdown. Similarly Chuy needs advice from Abigail since she perceives her proper gender performance as needing his guidance. Chuy's dependence on Abigail is portrayed in the novel to show some of Abigail's shortcomings. The narrator does not suggest that Chuy should act on her own, but he is upset when Abigail fails to measure up and plan Chuy's actions properly. The narrator subtly suggests that Chuy's murder is ultimately caused by Abigail's failure to ensure her proper gender identity. It is no fault of Chuy, who acts accordingly to the correct parameters of her identity.

The character of "La Taylor" causes the breakdown of gender identity. It is hard for the narrator to classify this character as either feminine or masculine. Although "La Taylor" is clearly not acting in a proper masculine manner, some behaviors exhibited by the character cause doubt. "La Taylor" takes over from Abigail when Abigail fails to guide Chuy. In fact "La Taylor" acts as a lieutenant ready to assume responsibility when Abigail is absent. When "La Taylor" is introduced, Genevevo is curious about "La Taylor's" gender, "¿Qué eres, hombre o mujer? (el genevevo le preguntó a la Taylor); estás re bonito, cabrón, hasta me dan ganas de darte un beso." ["What are you, man or woman? (Genevevo asked "La Taylor"); you are really cute, fucker, I am even tempted to kiss you."] (Ramírez 1979, 69) "La Taylor" complies with Genevevo's request and kisses him. This causes much confusion for Genevevo and the other men who feel sexually attracted to "La Taylor." The character's gender is never resolved in the novel.

"La Taylor's" ultimate fate, along with Chuy's, is to be eliminated. Their bizarre death is publicized as a passionate crime through a tabloid. The tabloid implies that Chuy, "La Taylor," and their wealthy employer committed a triple suicide. The report of the triple suicide states that "La Taylor" is a woman, but the narrator feels offended by such statement. He affirms that the

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reporters were easily confused by “La Taylor’s” attractiveness and did not (literarily) look deeper into the matter. This also confirms his belief that this was not a triple suicide but rather an act of murder. The narrator wants the “truth” to be known – “La Taylor” was not a woman (or a complete woman) and Chuy would never kill herself.

“La Taylor’s” character constructs an identity based on cinematic performance. “La Taylor” performs a specific type of femininity constructed through watching Hollywood films. On the one hand, “La Taylor” is a drag recreation of Elizabeth Taylor, who is assumed to be a “real” woman, while on the other, “La Taylor’s” overt gender performance suggests that all the other characters in the novel are similarly performing specific gender identities.

Literary Order

Ramírez’s introduction to this novel alludes to the constant crashes between the upper- and lower-classes in refining the geography of the city. This commentary is only meaningful if the middle and upper-classes read it. Despite its ostensible use of melodrama, the novel relies on narrative techniques popularized by the Latin American boom. These techniques are primarily intended for an audience familiar with boom novels, which are considered “elite” writing.

Although *Violación en Polanco* is marketed as a testimony of the lower-classes, it is a product ultimately intended for the cultured elite. The novel challenges the reader linguistically. Ramírez utilizes Mexico City slang to describe the many sexual situations depicted in the novel. The slang is easy to decipher, but the reader is confronted by a series of violent sexual acts that might intimidate more conservative readers. In fact, Ramírez’s readers usually tend to be those not easily bothered by the crudeness of the scenes depicted. Among those readers, of course, are liberal intellectuals. Ramírez writes his novel for that audience.

Ramírez's novel is structured around the illusion of disorder. The narration alternates between the recollections of the narrator in the movie theatre – these occurred in the past and are structured chronologically – and the brutal kidnapping, rape, and murder of “la señora,” which is happening in real time. The narration carefully guides the reader through multiple clues that establish each shift chronologically. Structurally there are only two “chapters” in the novel, but each chapter is broken down into different sections (each coinciding with a narrative shift) that are carefully delineated through the use of breaks. The break from one chapter to the other occurs in mid-climax as the narrator is actually ejaculating while having sex with Chuy. This break emphasizes the importance of the act in relation to the narrator's resolve to murder “la señora.” This break thus serves the purpose of implying that the narrator is irrevocably changed by having sex with Chuy and begins a new page – so to speak.

In the novel, linguistic disruption is used to express cognitive dissonance. Language deliberately breaks down throughout the novel. The existence of “La Taylor” causes the first linguistic breakdown. The narrator's discomfort with “La Taylor” is revealed in his alternation between “él” [“he”] and “ella” [“she”] – he finally opts for “lo” [a gender-neutral pronoun], to refer to “La Taylor.” This implies that “La Taylor's” existence requires the creation of a new identity that falls outside of what is normative.

The brutality of the murder of “la señora” is also expressed through a linguistic breakdown. As the climax builds up, the narrator begins to lose the ability to speak in full, coherent sentences. His sexual desires begin to invade his speech and are expressed by the expression “pu” which begins to appear rhythmically. Correct punctuation disappears and everything is either capitalized or in lower caps. At the end of the novel, the crime is linguistically expressed through the use of onomatopoeias that state that the woman's body is

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dumped in a sewer line. The linguistic breakdown suggests the breakdown of reality. As the men get caught in the performance of the murder, reality becomes as if it was a film. Passages that could be interpreted as “dreams” or “hallucinations” appear, leaving the reader unsure of what is actually happening. The narrator begins alternating (in the same sentence) between films he saw at the movie theatre and what is occurring.

Twilight Time in the City

Twilight time is synonymous with lower-class agency in *Violación en Polanco*. Most of the action occurs under the auspices of darkness. The novel manipulates preconceived notions about the potential dangers present at night. Darkness is portrayed as a vulnerable time for the upper- and middle-classes. From the perspective of the lower-classes, night gives them freedom and the run of the city.

Armando Ramírez utilizes darkness to facilitate the performance of lower-class masculinity. Darkness gives the men an advantage over the upper-classes. In the novel, darkness is necessary to carry out the kidnapping of the woman. The men enter Polanco at night and extract the woman from her native habitat. The men then begin a tour of the city aboard the bus. The anonymity of their vehicle and the emptiness of the streets during the night allow them to navigate the city undisturbed and unnoticed. This plays into middle and upper-class fears about the actions of lower-class men at night. Supposedly this is the time where crime is committed and when the upper- and middle-class people are vulnerable.

Darkness gives the illusion of privacy, but in fact fosters the public performance of masculinity. The artificiality of the darkness is hinted during the scenes in the movie theatre. In the cinema, the audience supposedly can only see the movie. At this particular movie theatre, the

audience sees the movie *and* the actions of the men – most of them sexual in nature. It is important for these men to masturbate, have sex, talk about sex with each other while watching the film, and bear witness to these actions for each other.

The violent actions inside the bus also depend on the dual function of darkness – to delineate boundaries and allow the performance of masculinity. The intimate space inside the bus created by the night allows the men to trade places as performers and as watchers. They are able to create a pseudo-film theatre in order to star in their own film. They are constructing a private experience that will allow them to perform their masculinity and symbolically mend the wounds caused by Chuy and “La Taylor’s” murder.

The brutal murder of the woman is akin to an Aztec sacrifice intended to renovate masculinity. The novel ends with, “la luz comienza a entrar ahg ahg ahga la noche termina ahga ahga ahga brr brr el día empieza brr brr sangre cloap cloap cloap cloap cloap cloap cloap cloap” [“light begins to enter ahg ahg ahga night ends ahga ahga ahga brr brr the day begins brr brr blood cloap cloap cloap cloap cloap cloap cloap cloap”] (Ramírez 1979, 152). For the narrator, the murder of the woman represents a ritual that needs to be carried out in order to bring the sun out. The narrator utilizes what he knows about Aztec mythology to fashion himself capable of such an act. The emergence of the sun suggests the renovation of masculinity since the sun represents power, prowess, and maleness.

The Modern City

Twentieth century popular culture in Mexico is concerned with the effects of modernization. Many of these portrayals are from the supposed perspective of the lower-classes and are about their exclusion from the benefits of the modernization project. *Violación en*

Polanco belongs to that tradition, but it stands out because it portrays the lower-classes fighting back.

The novel is dependent on travels around a changing city. The late 1960's and 1970's were the decades of urbanization projects to make Mexico City a modern city. Diane E. Davis says in *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century* (1994) of this time,

Mexico City boasted Latin America's first skyscraper, rising standards of living, a sophisticated cultural life, and some of the developing world's most modern urban amenities, including a gleaming new rapid transit system. The economy flowered and the capital city sparked as the symbol of the country's successful confrontation with modernity. (Davis 1994, 2)

It is no accident that the novel includes these urban marvels. The skyscraper that Davis mentions is La Torre Latinoamerica, which features prominently in the novel. This is the symbol of modern Mexico – the tower is a phallic symbol representing national prowess and power. The novel presents the behaviors of the lower-class men in opposition with these symbols of modernity.

The lower-class male characters in *Violación en Polanco* are excluded from all the “modern urban amenities.” Mexico City's modernizing effort was elaborated in favor of the upper- and middle-classes. Ramírez makes a comment about this in his introduction to *Violación en Polanco*. He says, speaking on behalf of the lower-classes, “Nos arrojaron del Sur, ellos se quedaron con el mejor clima, pusieron a su disposición los servicios municipales, los centros de educación, de información, generaron su cultura oficial.” [“We were expelled from the South, they kept the best climate, they have municipal services, education centers, information, they created the official culture”] (Ramírez 1979, 9) Ramírez's introductory words frame the novel's actions as a lower-class attempt to reverse this injustice. According to Ramírez, this injustice is

in fact a violent act committed against the lower-classes. They have been violently expelled and their culture has been overshadowed.

Violación en Polanco presents alternatives to the state-sponsored narratives about the modernization project and its effects. Officially, the modernization project is for the benefit of all. In reality, the modernization of the city's historic districts caused the expulsion of many lower-class inhabitants who could no longer afford to live there. The novel features male characters whose actions and remarks are uttered in response and in protest of their exclusion from the benefits of this project.

The men carry out an attack on the modernization project through their twilight city excursion. They travel to important modern Mexico City landmarks. These range from La Torre Latinoamericana, to Polanco, to Tlatelolco, to the Zócalo. Many of these spaces were created for the upper- and middle-classes. The lower-class men temporarily invade this forbidden space in order to create havoc. Their presence in these spaces alone can be interpreted as an act of resistance. The creation of these spaces is an integral part of the modernization project in hopes to discipline society and "civilize" individuals. The lower-class men are portrayed as *outside* this normative society. Their behavior threatens the fabric of these spaces by challenging their symbolic and edifying value. Most importantly, their disorder invalidates the totalizing narrative that these spaces foster. Their creation of disorder is a powerful symbolic resistance but because it is so ephemeral, its practical consequences are limited.

The men use the only tools available to them to temporarily overpower the state and the upper-classes— their body and spoken language. The men are portrayed as men acting and speaking freely. The upper-class characters are concerned about their reputations and thus guard their actions and language. The men have no such limitations because their identity (in the novel)

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is constructed outside of normative society. This both benefits and hinders them. Because they are outside of normative society, the men are free to create chaos. Yet, it only happens at night and the agency that goes with it is limited and temporary. This is a short-lived experience, but one with profound effects.

The men's actions take control of the city's modernizing vehicle. The remarking of the city in the twentieth century was in response to the introduction of motorized vehicles. They become both the symbol and vehicle of the city. The lower-classes in Mexico are unable to afford automobiles, and hence are excluded from the benefits of the process. The actions in the novel symbolically hijack the city's modernizing vehicle and use it to create turmoil. This is a reversal of class privilege and class violence. Rather than suffering injury and indignity caused by motor vehicle accidents and the remaking of the city to fit the automobile-using class, the lower-class men use a motor vehicle to symbolically and literarily inflict violence upon the city and the bodies of the upper-class. It is no accident that the men hijack a bus – this is the only motorized transport that they have access to. Their actions suggest that the supposedly accessible public transport leaves the lower-classes at a disadvantage and equally powerless in the city. The lower-class men need to take control of the bus in order to feel empowered and take control of the city.

Imagining Resistance

Lower-class resistance in *Violación en Polanco* is portrayed through the use of language and the manipulation of the audience's focus of attention. Through the manipulation of existing languages to create an urban slang, lower-class men are portrayed as expressing creativity and symbolically excluding the upper-classes. The narrative is constructed to show lower-class depth

and agency. Yet, ultimately the beneficiary of this imagined resistance is the middle-class audience.

Violación en Polanco presents the breakdown of language as the narrator participates in the rape and murder of the woman. The character of the narrator is constructed as a bridge between the lower-class characters and the novel's imagined audience. He is said to be an aspiring novelist and screenwriter, suggesting that he is able to manipulate proper Spanish and lower-class slang, unlike the other characters in the novel. The narrator guides the audience and allows it to vicariously participate in sexual and violent acts. As the novel nears its climax, language becomes uncontrollable and breaks down completely. Only the narrator and the audience are privy to its relation to reality. The other characters are unable to access the narration because it is happening in the narrator's head, but the audience is able to understand the referents that cause the creation of a truncated linguistic experience brought forth by violence and rage.

The explicit role-playing of the men during the rape in *Violación en Polanco* is created as a form of communication between the men that allows them to vicariously experience each other's actions, as well as those in the screen. The audience is invited to participate in all the actions through the narration. Most of the narration in the novel focuses on the inner tensions between the male characters. They wish to see each other having sex with women, while secretly wishing to be with each other. Only the audience is privy to this subtext. The tension is presented through the use of sight, film, and mirrors. Through reading, the audience is "entering" into the inner-world of the lower-class men and contributes another layer to the elaboration of the novel's subtext of repressed desire. The audience can safely position themselves inside the novel and participate in the mayhem vicariously.

The novel expresses the desire for women and the control of their bodies. The audience is imagined as a middle-class audience – but not necessarily one composed of heterosexual men. *Violación en Polanco* is full of overt homoeroticism and hence presupposes that some male members of the audience are interested in homoerotic subtexts – although this does not mean that those members of the audience would identify themselves as “gay.”

Women are integral part of the imagined audience. Mexican popular culture often portrays situations where women are presented as sexually desirable. For example, several magazines exclusively marketed for women like *TV y Novelas* and *TV Notas* routinely feature photos of scantily-clad celebrities – both male and female. Women are trained to view these texts and to unconsciously desire the women featured – both to be like them and to also imagine themselves as possessing them. This does not mean that women are necessarily expected to have homosexual desires, but it does mean that women are trained to consume texts about the domination of women and are expected to sexually identify with not only the characters controlling these women, but also with the women being controlled. Women are not prohibited from this identification as long as it is presented as heteronormal; in other words, the identification is understood to be mediated by the male characters desiring the women.

Ramírez’s concern with the modernizing project leads him to create the possibility of lower-class male resistance based on violence and sexuality. The violence is targeted at upper-class women and the symbols of modernity. Only specific forms of violence are presented as resistance. For example, the lower-class men engage in violence and aggressive sexual acts between each other. However, this violence is not interpreted as resistance, and its potential role in the continued exploitation of the characters is not explored. Gender in this novel is structured both through the directionality of violence and the public performance of specific sexual acts.

Women do not have a performative role in this novel, either as spectators or participants. Instead, women are objects to be possessed or controlled; similarly, the nocturnal city itself is a blank slate upon which the male characters write in violence. Mexico City is portrayed as a site of violence between the social classes; the modernizing project is violence writ large on the lower-classes, while the lower-classes use the symbols of modernity and the bodies of upper-class women to respond in kind. Ramírez's novel presents a spatiality of violence in which no one benefits and the symbols of resistance are destructive to their supposed beneficiaries.

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