

Unveiling authoritarian repression of insurgency in José Ricardo Morales' play *Los culpables*

Develando la represión autoritaria de la insurgencia en la obra de teatro de José Ricardo Morales *Los culpables*

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a critical analysis and discussion of José Ricardo Morales' play *Los culpables* (1964), which may encourage critical reflection on Chile's political reality concerning the repression of anti-authoritarian movements. The study aims to demonstrate the relevance of Morales' play in contemporary Chile. This play serves as a case study to explore the playwright's ideas regarding the repressive and authoritarian practices employed by a military government against citizens labeled insurgents, ultimately aiding in the examination of the Chilean context. Since this play represents various historical events linked to authoritarianism, particularly World War II and Francoism, we argue that it foreshadows the implementation of authoritarian practices by the state in Chilean society, including

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the state's criminalization of protesters, insurgents, and anti-authoritarian movements in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the criminalization of social movements during the recent 2019 Social Outbreak civil protests.

KEYWORDS

José Ricardo Morales, *Los culpables*, authoritarian practices, repressive cultural rhetorics, Chilean politics

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta un análisis crítico y discusión sobre la obra de teatro de José Ricardo Morales, *Los culpables* (1964), que puede contribuir a una reflexión crítica sobre la realidad política de Chile, respecto a la represión de movimientos antiautoritarios. El estudio busca demostrar la relevancia de la obra teatral de Morales en el Chile actual. Para ello, se utiliza la obra dramática como estudio de caso para discutir las ideas de este dramaturgo acerca de la represión y las prácticas autoritarias de un gobierno militar sobre los ciudadanos que denomina como insurgentes, lo cual, a su vez, se puede utilizar para analizar el contexto chileno. Dado que esta obra teatral representa diversos contextos históricos relacionados con el autoritarismo, en particular, la Segunda Guerra Mundial y el franquismo, sostenemos que aquello es un prelude del ejercicio de las prácticas autoritarias ejercidas por parte del Estado en la sociedad chilena, tales como la criminalización de los movimientos de protestantes, insurgentes y antiautoritarios en las décadas de 1960 y 1970, y la criminalización de los movimientos sociales durante las recientes protestas civiles del estallido social de 2019 en Chile.

PALABRAS CLAVE

José Ricardo Morales, *Los culpables*, prácticas autoritarias, retóricas culturales represivas, política chilena

Introduction

This article critically examines and discusses the play *Los culpables*, published in 1964 in the journal *Anales de la Universidad de Chile* by the Spanish-Chilean playwright José Ricardo Morales. It draws upon the problematization in the play of military regimes' repression of collective actors. To achieve this, we will analyze how Morales presents anti-authoritarian and insurgent movements, as well as the relationships between these

movements and the repressive regimes they confront. This article focuses on the case study of *Los culpables* to analyze and discuss the playwright's ideas regarding the military government's consistent repression of anti-authoritarian movements. Additionally, this analysis critically examines the Chilean context by presenting the emergence of anti-authoritarian movements in Chile during the 1960s and 1970s, as well as their subsequent development up to the present (Del Valle, 2021, 2022). Unlike previous groundbreaking studies on Morales' theatre (Ahumada and Godoy (2012), Azcue (2014), Aznar Soler (2006), Catalá (2013), Del Valle (2021), Godoy and Ahumada (2013), and Valdivia (2014), among many others), particularly those focusing on *Los culpables* (Del Valle, 2022; García-Manoso, 2016), this article adopts a new approach to the analysis of this play: we will center on the social protests in Chile resulting from the implementation of neoliberal economic changes during the Pinochet regime from 1973 to 1989, as well as the recent massive protests in 2019, to argue that José Ricardo Morales' play *Los culpables* can critique and unmask the rhetoric of repression against collective actions such as anti-authoritarian movements or insurgency, as emphasized in the play.

Contemporary Chilean theatre

In Chile, numerous cultural and artistic works have contributed to reflecting on pressing social issues during the second half of the 20th century. For instance, the marginalized and libertarian movements fighting for greater justice, as well as citizens combating authoritarian regimes, are showcased in Violeta Parra's song album *El folklore de Chile V. III, Toda Violeta Parra*, released in 1961, Víctor Jara's song album *Manifiesto* in 1974, and Pedro Lemebel's novel *Loco afán, crónicas de sidario*, published in 1996, among many others. Such interventions can be found in various analyses of literary production, particularly in theatre, which is of special interest since it represents social experiences in life from an artistic, simulative, and experiential perspective, engaging spectators and readers in specific events (Alano and Kong, 2012). Theatre traditions addressing local social issues throughout the 20th century in Chile include Teatro Costumbrista, Teatro Universitario, and Teatro Experimental (Cortés and Barrea-Marlys, 2003).

Chilean theater underwent its most significant transformation in the 1940s with the establishment of the Teatro Experimental Foundation. This theater company has its roots in the Spanish Exile, aiming to create a professional theater (Piña, 2014). As noted by Chilean theater expert Juan Andrés Piña (2014), this transformation was not random; it reflected the country's gradual maturation toward a new theater that attracted

spectators beyond the intellectual elite. The Teatro Experimental was founded by a group of students from the Instituto Pedagógico at the Universidad de Chile, who revitalized theater in Chile by focusing on representing Chilean society and local social conflicts, which were connected to the Hispanic tradition (Boyle, 1992). Such fundamental changes were made possible by various economic and socio-cultural transformations within Chilean society. First, the emergence of the left-wing political coalition called Frente Popular from 1936 to 1941; second, the rise of governments led by the Partido Radical from 1938 to 1952; and third, the development of Teatro Universitario and Teatro Experimental in 1941. As mentioned by Piña (2014), the establishment of Teatro Universitario at the Universidad de Chile in 1941 and at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile in 1943 played a decisive role in consolidating a less commercial theater focused on staging classical and modern plays in its repertoire.

Despite the positive transformation of Chilean theater in the first half of the 20th century, the literary field later suffered under the censorship of Pinochet's dictatorship (1973-1990). As a result, writers who had freely expressed their ideas during Salvador Allende's socialist government were limited to topics approved by the military regime in Chile (Del Valle, 2021). During this period, commonly referred to as the dismantling of theater in Chile, some playwrights were exiled while others remained in Chile, writing from the margins of society (Boyle, 1992). This censorship led to a time of clandestine literary production in Chile, which was seen as an art form of resistance against authoritarian regimes and ongoing inequality in the country (Alano and Kong, 2012). These Chilean theater traditions, including the Teatro Nacional, are essential for reflecting on Chile's history and culture, as they served as a visual container and cultural source, connecting local people with events occurring abroad (Poblete and Saavedra, 2015).

Authoritarian practices in contemporary Chile

This section offers a brief theoretical framework for understanding the rise of state authoritarian practices in contemporary Chile. It examines how the state has implemented authoritarian measures within Chilean society, particularly regarding the criminalization of protesters, insurgents, and anti-authoritarian movements from the 1970s to the present.

The period of authoritarian rule in contemporary Chile began with the 1973 civic-military coup led by a military junta under Augusto Pinochet (Ratke, 2017). This coup overthrew Salvador Allende's democratic administration, a coalition of left-wing parties, in response to the economic, political, and social chaos that plagued the country at the time. Subsequently, the recovery of democracy in 1990, in line with the third wave of

democratization in Latin American countries (Huntington, 1991), marked a period of social stability, during which political parties and social actors aimed to establish a prosperous nation, focusing on social and economic development. An exception was the right-wing political party Unión Demócrata Independiente (UDI), which emerged in 1983 as an authoritarian successor to the military regime (Loxton, 2021). Former members of this right-wing party now belong to far-right factions participating in the upcoming 2025 elections in Chile: José Antonio Kast, a former UDI member and now presidential candidate for his Partido Republicano, and Johannes Kaiser, another former UDI member and current presidential candidate for his party, the Partido Nacional Libertario.

Since the democratic approach adopted after the 1990s involved the implementation of neoliberal policies to address poverty, it resulted in social inequality, leading to a surge of social mobilizations (Solimano and Zapata, 2024). In the early 21st century, this context witnessed collective protests gain renewed attention through mobilizations and cultural performances by various anti-authoritarian movements and other collectives (Donoso and Von Bülow, 2017). After the civic-military dictatorship (1973-1989), various collective actors in Chile protested against the neoliberal economic model established during and after that period, facing police repression and state violence (Garretón, 2003). Notable instances include the secondary student protests for public education in 2001, 2006, 2014, and 2015; the Mapuche protests demanding land rights and autonomy in 2009 and 2013; environmental protests against the installation of hydroelectric dams in 2011; miners' protests advocating for a reassessment of national policy in 2011 and 2013; university student protests pushing for educational reforms in 2011, 2014, and 2015; the No+AFP massive protests demanding a public pension system in 2016; feminist demonstrations in 2016 and 2018; the social outbreak of 2019; the demand for Covid quarantine in 2020; protests for constitutional changes in 2020 and 2021; and demonstrations from various sectors of Chilean society calling for better social conditions in 2023 and 2024 (Ortiz et al., 2022).

***Los culpables*: A critique of the authoritarian repression of insurgents and social movements**

José Ricardo Morales is a Spanish-Chilean playwright who developed avant-garde theater that explored social conflicts of universal relevance, such as the abuse of power in authoritarian regimes. He was exiled to Chile at the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939. In this country, Morales co-founded the Experimental Theater Company at the University of Chile in 1941 (Chilean National Theatre in 1975). This experimental theater was

crucial for the professionalization of Chilean theater in the 1940s (Valdivia, 2014).

Morales' play *Los culpables* [The Guilty Ones] (Cortés and Barrea-Marlys, 2003) was published by the journal *Anales de la Universidad de Chile* in 1964. This dramatic work is fictional but incorporates elements of reality, including discussions of propaganda and repression in authoritarian regimes. It reflects Morales' intention to create a political and philosophical commentary on anti-authoritarian movements and insurgents opposing a military regime during the first half of the 20th century. Given that Morales' intellectual and artistic legacy demands further interdisciplinary analysis beyond the simplistic notions of the national canon (Del Valle, 2021; Valdivia, 2014), we argue that this visionary play is now more relevant than ever, as it can enrich the debate on the authoritarian repression of anti-authoritarian movements in contemporary Chilean social conflicts. This potential is evident when summarizing the storyline. The play is set in 1944 at a military facility in an unnamed country, where miners on strike protest against the military government (Del Valle, 2022). To stop the protests, the character of *The Colonel in Chief* (El coronel en jefe) (hereafter referred to as *The Chief*) randomly accuses the citizen *María Garcés* (female character) of planning subversive and terrorist acts. This false accusation also serves to justify violence and repression against the striking miners.

As a consequence, *María Garcés* – also referred to as *The Woman* (La mujer) in some episodes of the play – is unjustly found guilty of being the leader of a terrorist group and planning attacks against the state. Following this, she abruptly takes responsibility for the charges presented during the trial. Eventually, all the citizens realize that the false allegation was a farce orchestrated by *The Chief* to manipulate information and suppress the demonstrations. Consequently, the general is compelled to take responsibility for the false accusation against an innocent person. The play concludes when *The Assistant* (El ayudante) informs *The Chief* that recent reports indicate two suspects have been arrested. Then, *The Chief* begins making another false accusation to justify repression against the citizens and protesters. This play represents a pars pro toto for the dynamic between authoritarian regimes and anti-authoritarian movements.

The emergence of insurgents and social movements facing authority represented in *Los culpables*

This play addresses the topic of an authoritarian regime repressing insurgents in 1944, specifically referring to the first half of the twentieth century, particularly in European countries like Italy and France. The author emphasizes the character of *María Garcés* as a symbol of the oppressed

and a member of the resistance or insurgency (referring to those who combat their own country's government or armed forces) facing social and economic inequality policies generated by the military government. In the following paragraphs, we will examine the emergence of the insurgency leading an anti-authoritarian movement by chance in Morales' play, which may contribute to critical reflection on the rise of anti-authoritarian movements in Chile during the 20th and 21st centuries.

Los culpables emphasizes the false accusations (and later wrongful convictions) of planning a subversive attack against *María Garcés*. This episode presents a critical examination of the barriers that prevented women from participating in politics during the first half of the 20th century. The character of *María Garcés* can be associated with feminism, especially when she acknowledges all the charges against her. In our view, it demonstrates *María Garcés'* argument in favor of revolutionary ideas against the social injustices instituted by the military government in the city:

THE CHIEF. I read your affiliation. Are you satisfied?

MARÍA GARCÉS. Point by point. [...]

THE CHIEF. I understand that you will cooperate with this investigation.

MARÍA GARCÉS. As I am nobody, I neither participate nor reject anything. I accept it. I accept it.

THE CHIEF. What?

MARÍA GARCÉS. I accept what you made of me. I accept that I carried a weapon, cryptic messages, and clandestine propaganda. I acknowledge that I hid an arsenal. I accept what I have denied so far. If you want, I can sign the declaration immediately. Regardless, it is enough to say yes on the board (Morales, 1964, pp. 79-80).

The previous extract of the play shows *María Garcés* accepting the indictment not because it is correct but because she identifies with the leader of a radical organization that she falsely invented for herself. The performative role of the government's discourse against *María Garcés* (a random citizen) reveals that anti-authoritarian movements did not exist before, but their adversarial rhetoric helped create them. In that context, a vital insight from the play is the social polarization of the anti-authoritarian movements, which refers to the extremity of the positions (Voelz and Freischläger, 2019). This polarization is fueled by the military government's discourse of fear and the us vs. them rhetoric, convincing citizens that they must confront the enemy to prevent the country from succumbing to terrorists. Therefore, it is important to highlight that *The Chief* invented a subversive character to accuse an innocent woman of

spreading insurrection, justifying further brutal acts against the citizens. This underscores the performative function of the government's accusations against María and the insurgents or anti-authoritarian movements, as they seek to create a sense of polarization between the government and the rebel movements, which indeed puts the country's unity at risk (Voelz and Freischläger, 2019).

Furthermore, Morales emphasizes the character of María Garcés, fully endorsing all the accusations against her, which are linked to the ideas promoted by feminist libertarian movements in Chile. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from the play:

THE CHIEF. Because the evidence was undeniable...

MARÍA GARCÉS. No. It is because I accept the fictional María Garcés and not the spurious evidence. However, I identify with this character you created for me. When you, with impunity, turn the innocent into a perpetrator, it is valid to carry weapons and spread the rebellion. I accept this María Garcés you created of me because you imagined me as seditious and rebellious. (She stands up).

THE CHIEF. This is what I wanted to tell you...

MARÍA GARCÉS. Yes. I accept that I am a subversive character as I can rise against those who make people feel like objects and accuse them arbitrarily. María Garcés, the unconquered and brave offender, fully represents me: She is the one I would always like to be (Morales, 1964, pp. 79-80).

In Morales' critique of military repression, *María Garcés* emerges as a social actor confronting the military government's hegemony. This portrayal of *María Garcés*, who self-identifies as an insurgent woman, serves as an exemplary reflection of the revolutionary upheaval experienced by feminist movements during the 1960s and 1970s as they actively participated in popular and political struggles. The first wave of feminism was a liberal activist movement focused on achieving social and political equality. It arose in Europe and America in the early 19th century, combating women's social and legal inequalities (Purdy, 2005). The second wave concentrated on women's roles after World War II, asserting that they had been pushed back into homes, which «made them feel that wife and mother were their only viable roles» (Purdy, 2005). Finally, the third wave (from the 1990s to the present) addresses various contemporary issues, such as the rejection of dogma and academia, alongside the celebration of diversity, leading to broader political engagement and a commitment to social activism (Teruggi, 2008). According to Julieta Kirkwood (1986), these feminist movements have historically aimed to secure women's

rights to vote, improve labor laws, and access to education, resulting in greater political participation and involvement in the job market. Ultimately, feminism has played a vital role in the emergence of numerous global social movements challenging authoritarian practices, injustice, social inequality, and violence against women, while striving for women's inclusion in society in terms of legal, political, and social rights (Purdy, 2005).

Morales' play establishes several connections between the character of *María Garcés* in his dramatic work and the rise of Chilean feminist movements advocating for women's rights in Chile from the 1980s to the present. For example, in *Los culpables*, Morales highlights *María Garcés'* role as a social actor confronting the authoritarian repression of social movements, which is associated with the libertarian ideas of various anarchist movements aimed at dismantling political power and authority. This connection is evident in the episode where resistance members sent threatening notes to *The Chief* and his Assistant, ensuring their continued fight against the authoritarian regime. The following passage demonstrates how *María* and the resistance group's political stance can be directly linked to the libertarian ideas of anti-authoritarian movements:

THE ASSISTANT. My Colonel. We received these notes addressed to you, the mister Delegate, and me. No one knows who left the messages. The guard did not see anyone.

THE CHIEF. (*He picks up the notes and gives the corresponding notes to each of them. He takes his note and tears the paper. He reads.*)

«We will never forget, so neither does you.»

THE ASSISTANT. (*After checking them.*) Identical. Two copies... And one original: yours. Now they dare threaten us. Let us hope they stop going further (Morales, 1964, p. 89).

This representation of anti-authoritarian movements confronting a military government reveals the playwright's intention to problematize the portrayal of citizens as insurgents when facing authoritarian practices, which can be connected to Chilean conflicts, such as the anarchist and feminist movements opposing Pinochet's dictatorship in 1973. Additionally, the events of insurgents confronting the authoritarian government, which aims to control not only the administration but also the resources of the mining city in the play, can be linked to the student, libertarian, and feminist movements fighting the neoliberal economic model established by both right-wing and left-wing presidential administrations in Chile after the restoration of democracy in 1990. One significant anti-authoritarian movement is anarchism, which encompasses various libertarian movements that pursue social, economic, and political ideas. Regarding

the context of anarchist movements in Chile, Godoy (2016) notes that they provide an invaluable contribution to understanding the political landscape of social and popular struggles in the 19th and 20th centuries. He points out that anarchists have faced multiple social conflicts in Chile, including the civic-military dictatorship (1973-1989), repression against anti-authoritarian forces (1990-2009), and the student movement along with certain labor movements, such as the port workers from 2010 to 2015 (Godoy, 2016). In Chile, the term anarchism is diverse and distinct.

On one hand, anarchy refers to social revolts that undermine the government for various reasons, such as the desire for state unity. Additionally, there are two periods in Chile referred to as periods of anarchy: (1) The citizens' revolt following Bernardo O'Higgins' departure from the presidency, 1823-1830, and (2) The emergence of anarchist and libertarian movements in Chile due to the saltpeter strike, which resulted in the Santa María School massacre in 1907. On the other hand, anarchy also denotes libertarian and anarchist movements as a political philosophy. Anarchism in Chile did not develop as it did in other Latin American countries like Mexico, Uruguay, and Argentina for three main reasons: (1) Geographical isolation; (2) Minimal European immigration; and (3) Late industrialization (Cappelletti, 2018). To a large extent, these movements represent social actors in resistance and cultural movements aimed at reforming the state's authoritarian practices and addressing social and economic inequality. One example is the rise of the anarcho-sindicalist movement in the early 20th century, which has its roots in the anarchist wing of the First International in Europe, emerging as a direct response to industrialization and the growth of the urban working class in the 19th century. In most countries, anarchists collaborate with other radical movements on issues like global warming and opposition to authoritarian governments, such as in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We will continue discussing *María Garcés* in relation to the libertarian and feminist movements in the next section of the article.

Parallel to the portrayal of *María Garcés* as a member of a libertarian group linked to anti-authoritarian and feminist movements and ideologies, we observe a second crucial theme arising from Morales' critique of authoritarianism: the emphasis on *María* as a symbol of the oppressed. In *Los culpables*, the character of *María Garcés* embodies the people and represents the voice of the downtrodden. This is demonstrated in the episode of the play where the citizens begin to support her with phrases like «the streets are boiling» and «everybody is raging» (Morales, 1964, p. 89) after realizing that the government has falsely accused an innocent person. It also highlights that the citizens come to understand that *María's*

imprisonment is part of a political propaganda strategy employed by *The Chief*. This is evident in the passage where *The Chief* is sentencing an innocent person, *María Garcés*, who ultimately inspires the citizens to take action and fight against injustice, regardless of whether they label her as a «terrorist» and «subversive,» in order to evoke an emotional response from the public.

THE DELEGATE. It is a missed chance. Now, the terrorists are the problem.

THE CHIEF. (*Violently*). Then, those reports. There is nothing more important than reports. They are the first ones. Take them. Moreover, who cares about the first, the second, and the third reports!

THE DELEGATE. What is going on?

THE CHIEF. It happens that, as soon as we can get out of the mess, it will come another, another and another one [...] We are caught up. Don't you know? Our jail can extend into whatever we are in the world (*In a brief pause*). Besides, above all, we have María's problem. What benefits do we get by executing her? Nothing. The called chastisement called was, instead, a planting of adversaries. The streets are boiling. Everybody is raging.

THE DELEGATE. [...] How long will you be careful of María? The past is the past. You have to face other problems (Morales, 1964, pp. 88-89).

As demonstrated in the play, the authoritarian regime is fully aware of the consequences it may face when imprisoning members of libertarian groups, such as *María*, as most citizens are now supporting the insurgency. This situation also concerns *The Chief* and his subordinates about the potential future implications of killing *María Garcés*: the repercussions of imprisoning an innocent woman who becomes a martyr of activism. Here, we see that the false accusations of inciting violence and planning terrorist acts against *María* might prove counterproductive. They could lead citizens to view her as a possible leader of an anti-authoritarian movement opposing the military regime. See, for instance, the following passage of the play:

THE CHIEF. They are just the same... the problems caused by *María Garcés*... don't you want to find out? Your name can be heard all over the country. I looked for a perpetrator, but instead, I made a martyr. As we all well know, martyrs grow after death. When they die, they grow in stature... (*The Assistant appears on the left side. He stands at attention*) (Morales, 1964, pp. 88-89).

This excerpt from Morales' play illustrates that the citizens fully support the role of insurgents and legendary activists represented by the character *María Garcés*. Here, we can infer that *The Chief* fears giving the order for María's murder, arguing that it could worsen the situation by creating a martyr and subsequently leading to a more significant anti-authoritarian movement. This is evident in the passage when he claims that if she is dead, the anti-authoritarian movement will «grow in stature» (Morales, 1964, p. 89). As a result, he understands that *María Garcés* poses a greater danger if she dies, suggesting that martyrs «grow after death» (Morales, 1964, p. 89).

In the play, the martyr is typically portrayed as an individual confronting social inequality and injustice in a country governed by a military junta. This portrayal contrasts with the negative image of martyrs in the media, which often depicts them as members of a terrorist cell inciting violence against innocent people. The dimension of the martyr developed by Morales in the play can be observed in current situations where powerful countries avoid imprisoning political leaders falsely accused of being part of terrorist groups, as these leaders can become martyrs in the eyes of society. A vivid example from Chile is the military's decision not to kill *María Garcés*, which starkly contrasts with its decision to kill and torture citizens, including the torture and assassination of Chilean folk singer Víctor Jara during the civic-military dictatorship (1973-1989). Jara's death illustrates the consequences of killing a symbol of the people's resistance, as it creates a martyr who gains prominence in the revolutionary sphere, in Morales's words.

The relevance of *Los culpables* in the current Chilean context

While recognizing that Morales may not fully address the authoritarian repression of collective mobilizations in Chile during the 20th century, we believe this play draws several parallels to the civil protests led by anti-authoritarian movements advocating for improved social and economic conditions throughout various authoritarian regimes in Chile's history. Regarding the historical connections between the military government's violent repression of the insurgents in the play and the Chilean context, one clear example is the civic-military coup orchestrated by Augusto Pinochet in 1973, which prohibited, dismantled, and criminalized most organizations, social mobilizations, labor unions, and activist movements, including the notable Workers' United Center of Chile (Iglesias, 2017). This historical link underscores the play's significance in understanding and discussing the subsequent criminalization of social movements in Chile during the 1960s and 1970s. Scholars and politicians categorized these social movements as mass, popular, workers, peasant, or student

movements in the 1970s and 1980s (Iglesias, 2017). This period later gave rise to the Chilean center-left coalition Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia (Agreement of Parties for Democracy), commonly known as Concertación, which governed Chile from 1990 to 2010. This political coalition played a critical role in winning the presidential elections in 1989 and restoring democracy to Chile when, under the name Concertación de Partidos por el No, they defeated Pinochet's military regime in the National Plebiscite on October 5, 1988. The rise of anti-authoritarian movements and activists in post-dictatorship Chile led to advocacy for environmental rights, the rights of sexual minorities, indigenous rights, political reforms, and access to quality public education. However, most of Chile's social movements and collective mobilizations have emerged from citizens' street protests, rather than from institutions. This is particularly evident in the current large-scale movements against the private pension system (the NO+AFP movement), which supports the notion of a «political dealignment between Chilean civil society and its political parties» (Albala and Tricot, 2019, p. 145).

The topic of authoritarian power developed in the play can also prompt us to critically reflect on the repression of social movements in today's Chile. We believe this drama piece represents both the rise of insurgents advocating for anti-authoritarian voices and the challenges they encountered throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. These issues are pertinent in raising public awareness about current social protests against social inequality and women's rights that continue to impact Chilean society.

The authoritarian repression of the insurgents and social movements

In the play's first act, the character *The Chief* spreads false information to convince the citizens that an insurgent group led by *María Garcés* is planning a violent attack. Once in prison, *The Chief* refutes María's responses, blaming the military government for planting certain papers related to subversive propaganda and for a weapon found in her pocket. The following dialogue illustrates this, as *The Chief* deliberately accuses *María Garcés* of providing nonsensical answers, such as the police inventing the accusations against her:

THE WOMAN. When I got off, you gently helped me. Then, you put some papers mentioning subversive acts in my pocket. There they are (Pointing to the table). Immediately, you «discovered» the papers. Then, you opened the bag and found the weapon and key documents covered with metallic paper beside the bread. You arrested me.

THE CHIEF. A good story. Your imagination is extraordinary. Are you saying that we invented this?

THE WOMAN. I am just telling you the facts.

THE CHIEF. So the police are now leaving subversive propaganda to innocent victims [...] Because you are innocent...

THE WOMAN. That is right (Morales, 1964, pp. 73-74).

The dialogue between the suspect *María Garcés* and *The Chief* in the detention center illustrates the authoritarian regime's use of political propaganda and tactics based on fear to manipulate the truth against *María Garcés* and other members of alleged insurgent groups. According to Bussemer (2008), political propaganda often utilizes a communicative system to influence citizens' opinions regarding insurgent groups opposing the authoritarian regime. Additionally, Wodak (2015) points out that these political discourses of fear leveraged by authoritarian regimes and right-wing parties primarily highlight the division between good and evil, legitimizing denial and exclusion policies that depict these groups as dangerous threats to the nation, while also promising salvation and liberation. In the play's narrative, the propagation of political propaganda serves as an effective tool for *The Chief* and the military government to create an internal enemy, justifying severe repression against social movements and the citizenry. As discussed throughout the text, the playwright's depiction of social conflict in his 1964 play (originally written in 1944) provides insight into the context of contemporary Chile. This framework helps in understanding how various governments have consistently imposed the fictional narrative of an internal enemy labeled as criminals and terrorists by law and public opinion. Furthermore, this stereotyping of the internal enemy is significantly reflected in Chile's social and mass media discourses, where the Mapuche are branded as barbarians and libertarian movements (Del Valle, 2024). In Morales' critique of authoritarian repression, the military government appears to justify the use of violence as a political strategy for various purposes, including repressing striking miners and falsely accusing an innocent person, which resonates with the Chilean context, as contemporary state violence and police repression are generally employed to uphold the neoliberal economic model and the privatization of natural resources (hydroelectric and forestry companies) to maintain the status quo in Chile (Somma et al., 2020).

After *The Chief* accused *María Garcés* of giving nonsensical responses during the interview at the detention center, *María* maintains that all the accusations against her are false. Accordingly, this extract underscores *María's* stance supporting the notion that the police framed her by placing the weapon and subversive information in her pocket:

THE CHIEF. So you spread clandestine literature, hide arms, try to evade us, and, on top of that, you blame the police.

THE WOMAN. I am just telling the truth.

THE CHIEF. Who was the addresser of the encoded document?

THE WOMAN. Apparently, you.

THE CHIEF. That is enough! No more absurd! (Morales, 1964, p. 74).

The issue of the military government disseminating political propaganda in the country, as suggested by the playwright, involves supposedly violent groups coming from the capital city, which results in *The Chief* and his subordinates conveniently and unjustly prosecuting an innocent person. As discussed in previous studies on Morales' theatre, *Los culpables* portrays the authoritarian government as creating false internal enemies within the country, utilizing this as a powerful political propaganda tool to perpetuate power and preserve the status quo (Del Valle, 2022). In the specific case of the play, Morales illustrates a military government accusing insurgent movements of planning a terrorist attack to prevent protests in the city and thereby maintain power. *The Chief* also convinces citizens that María is a subversive figure camouflaged among them, whose traumatic life experiences lead her to become involved with a terrorist group. To fit this profile, *The Chief* highlights María's studies in law and her parents' assassination in a previous bombing attack, as illustrated in the following extract from the play:

THE CHIEF. That is politics. Either you win or learn. There is no other way since the world is the world. (*The right door is open. María Garcés comes in*). Sit down. (*The inmate obeys. She stays in front of the public, sitting in the chair Gonzalito recently abandoned*). Her name is María Garcés Llana. She is 30 years old. She is single. Her address is 17 Del Arco Street. She spent four years studying law. No relatives. Her parents died in the bombing of March (Morales, 1964, p. 79).

After being unjustly accused of planning terrorist acts, *María Garcés* unexpectedly admits the allegations, claiming that she has always aspired to be the insurgent who was wrongfully convicted. *María's* attitude reflects an act of civil disobedience, as it addresses a legitimate social protest that defies a norm she was required to follow. The act of civil disobedience, in Tescione's (2013) words, consists of a «public and nonviolent, contentious yet political act as contrary to law» (p. 1), which characterizes *María's* protests against the arbitrary application of the law and her self-acceptance as the radical activist opposing the military regime, pursuing a collective social interest.

From the playwright's perspective, *María Garcés* embodies the consequences of authoritarian regimes' use of power by spreading false information to quell protests and control the city. However, as previously stated in this study, *María Garcés* can also be seen as a symbol of feminist ideals within Morales' play, representing the resistance against the repression faced by women under the authoritarian government. The playwright's portrayal of María—a woman unjustly accused of being the leader of an insurgent group and planning terrorist attacks—further highlights the gender of the leaders. *The Chief's* unusual reaction underscores this when he is unexpectedly informed that the suspect is a woman, *María Garcés*:

THE ASSISTANT. (*Standing at attention*). My Colonel. Our agents arrested a woman. She was coming from the capital city. She was found carrying subversive propaganda. It is a piece of relevant information.

THE CHIEF. Bring her to me. A woman...

THE DELEGATE. You did not expect it, did not you? Will you change your decision?

THE CHIEF. Why? We will not cancel the plan. I was just wondering why fate is surprising me: a woman... (Morales, 1964, p. 72).

As stated above, *The Chief* was shocked when his subordinates informed him about the gender of the detained person—a woman. This situation relates to the widespread gender stereotypes of the 1960s, during which men typically led most social movements and political organizations. This play highlights the military government's use of a subversive fictional character to prosecute an innocent person. It emphasizes the error made by *The Chief* when he randomly selected a woman to be unjustly accused of planning and preparing terrorist acts. Additionally, *The Chief* appeared surprised when his subordinates arrested a subversive female activist. This surprise may stem from the fact that women were primarily stereotyped as mothers, homemakers, and sexual objects, rather than being recognized as leaders of libertarian movements. *María Garcés'* representation in the play evolves from an ordinary woman to being perceived as the presumed leader of a resistance movement, which is significant as it coincides with the global rise of feminist activism in the 1960s and 1970s. This articulation by *María Garcés* closely relates to feminism in Chile, which coincided with the increase in women's participation in political parties and popular social movements, known as the Years of Silence, between the 1950s and the 1970s (Kirkwood, 1986).

Revising the current criminalization of anti-authoritarian movements in Chile

In *Los culpables*, military officials refer sympathetically to the Spanish victory against Franco, the German führer, and the attempt on his life, as well as the Italian fascists. Representatives of the military and public order in a mining town detain *María Garcés*, a civilian wrongly accused of terrorist acts, imprisoned, and convicted. Her life is spared to prevent her from becoming a martyr. Ultimately, the officials and their superiors are *culpables* (guilty) of lies, repression, and violence; however, the cycle will continue with new victims.

More than fifty years after Morales wrote *Los culpables*, the global political landscape has undergone significant changes. Nevertheless, the criminalization of the state represented by a military government, along with the arrival of insurgents and resistance movements confronting the regime, which appears to be the playwright's principal concern, remains relevant, especially in contemporary Chilean society. Concrete examples include the protests by miners and environmentalists against industrial mining projects and the installation of power plants, the rise of students taking to the streets to protest against educational inequalities, Mapuche movements advocating for Indigenous rights, feminist mobilizations in favor of women's rights, and citizens protesting for economic and social change (the neoliberal model) in Chile at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Donoso and Von Bülow, 2017). In this regard, current social movements are effecting positive changes in Chilean society. These changes can be observed in the secondary student movement known as the *Revolución Pingüina* (Penguin Revolution) in 2006, the environmentalist movement *Patagonia Sin Represas* (Patagonia Without Dams) in 2011, the university student movement during the same year, and the *No+AFP* movement seeking to reform the private pension system, among many other instances. It is essential to clarify that, as Mario Garcés (2019) noted, the concept of social movement in Chile entered public discourse (academic, social, and political debate) with the student mobilizations of 2006 and 2011. Before that, citizens participating in protests were not recognized as members of any specific social movement. They were primarily unorganized workers responding to the political and economic crisis, but they lacked alternative social projects (Iglesias, 2017).

The examples described in the previous paragraph illustrate how new social mobilizations and student movements in 2006, 2009, 2011, and 2019 confronted governments' coercive practices with global support, thereby becoming crucial in public decision-making (Millward & Takhar, 2019). A clear example is the current successful left-wing political

coalition, Frente Amplio, which comprises various social movements led by university students who protested for free education in 2011. Founded in 2017, the political alliance Frente Amplio has achieved parliamentary representation (twenty deputies and one senator) and participated in the 2017 presidential election (the journalist Beatriz Sánchez), obtaining over twenty percent of the vote and securing third place in less than one year of the political campaign. Gabriel Boric, one of the founders of this political coalition, was elected president of Chile from 2022 to 2026. This political coalition has its roots in the Revolución Pingüina of 2006, which sparked massive public demonstrations demanding free and public education, as well as supporting ambitious demands such as the nationalization of the copper industry and constitutional reform (Larrabure, 2019). In contrast to the emergence of these social movements challenging the neoliberal government in Chile, new nationalist and political movements have arisen, reflecting citizens' resentment across all political and social structures. These include the populist movement Acción Republicana, founded in 2018, and the former political Party Fuerza Nacional, founded in 2019. The rise of far-right political movements demonstrates that the play not only presents various issues for discussing recent events in modern literature where authoritarian governments repress insurgents but also provides insight into the rise of authoritarian governments rooted in legal far-right social movements and political parties, such as the Partido Republicano.

On October 12, 2020, the government led by center-right president Sebastián Piñera employed the police force to violently repress insurgents and social movements protesting the high cost of living, healthcare, education, and public services (Palacios-Valladares, 2020). Six days after the social protest began, the Chilean government declared a state of emergency, deploying military forces to the streets in several cities following violent protests against an increase in metro fares—initially led by secondary school students—in Santiago, the capital city (Palacios-Valladares, 2020). This decision led to the criminalization of social protests, transforming social unrest into a matter of public safety to control perceived criminals—a phenomenon not observed since the 1973 civic-military dictatorship (Iglesias, 2017). The central aspect of this event, known as Estallido Social (social outburst) in Chile, is the abuse of power, inequality, and authoritarian leanings (Charney et al., 2021). However, the primary demand is to end the 1980 Constitution, created by dictator Augusto Pinochet, which established the legal framework for a market-driven economic model that privatized pensions, healthcare, and education in Chile (Somma et al., 2020). This Constitution granted Pinochet increased powers, including the authority to remain President for an additional eight years (Charney et

al., 2021). The scale of social protests in Chile led to a national referendum held on October 12, 2020, in which 78% of voters approved drafting a new Constitution through a Constituent Assembly elected by Chilean citizens. The Chilean historian Mario Garcés (2019) indicates that the movements above have faced two significant conflicts in post-dictatorship neoliberal Chile: «structural inequality» in society and the accumulation of abuses and rate increases in necessities such as healthcare, housing, and public transportation (p. 484). This social protest against a constitution created during Pinochet's military government establishes a parallel with the play, as the character of *María Garcés* and the insurgent and social movements also protest against the authoritarian rules imposed by a military government. This national protest against the Chilean government's strict measures further confirms that Morales' play can be valuable in understanding the specific dynamics of the current Chilean context, where the state systematically represses protesters, insurgents, and social movements.

***Los culpables*: beyond the literary text**

Morales' play, *Los culpables*, is significant as a literary work not only for its remarkable ability to denounce authoritarian state practices that lead to dictatorship or civil war but also for its potential to be recognized as an exceptional performative piece for discussion and staging in social contexts like education (Del Valle, 2023). Due to Morales' realist approach in this play (García-Manso, 2016), it can serve as a complementary resource for teaching Chilean history and politics in secondary education. As Del Valle (2023) argues,

[b]y reading and examining Morales' dramatic literature (scripts) as additional material, students can reflect on specific historical events like the rise of nationalism and media manipulation in totalitarian regimes included in Chilean history textbooks and the syllabus for secondary education (p. 2).

Similarly, using *Los culpables* in educational contexts enhances students' ability to take perspectives, analyze, and think critically when discussing repression and the criminalization of social movements in both past and present-day Chilean authoritarian regimes (Del Valle, 2023). Another crucial issue is the use of *Los culpables* as a performative act in the classroom, which allows students to engage their imaginations and reflect on their identities in the social world (Daniels and Downes, 2018). Unfortunately, Morales' plays have not yet been included in the Chilean secondary school curriculum (Del Valle, 2023).

The discussion surrounding the theatrical dimension of *Los culpables* is highly relevant, as Morales presents a real and current moral conflict to

viewers and readers in the 1960s. However, addressing this issue in this study is challenging, considering that most of Morales' plays have not been officially staged in Chile due to his exclusion from the Chilean literary canon and the scarcity of literary critics capable of understanding his project (Del Valle, 2021). This situation is difficult to grasp, especially since the play is easy to stage, taking place in a single dramatic space (García-Manso, 2016), which means it only requires a single stage set.

Conclusions

This article examines José Ricardo Morales' problematization of authoritarian and repressive practices against citizens in a mining city, who are portrayed as insurgents by the ruling military government in *Los culpables* (1964). The play sheds light on the ongoing rebellion, illustrating how authoritarian regimes work to repress citizenship and the alleged insurgents planning terrorist attacks against the city. The analysis reveals the play's significance in understanding and discussing several historical events that continue to impact Chilean society, such as the state's criminalization of protesters during the civic-military dictatorship from 1973 to 1989 and the October 2019 civil protests. In the playwright's critique of authoritarian repression, we find several conceptual parallels between the supposed arrival of an insurgent group led by the character *María Garcés* and the emergence of social movements confronting authoritarian regimes in Chile, which are similarly portrayed as insurgents, as was the case with various anti-authoritarian movements facing the civic-military dictatorship in 1973. Unlike the typical characteristics of social movements in the 1960s and 1970s, contemporary movements produce and disseminate their counter-hegemonic information (self-media) with the help of new technological resources connected to social media platforms.

In many cases, this has led to the construction of an alternative narrative that challenges the long-held discourses of the dominant elites. To this end, studying Morales' play reveals the apparent limitation of reflecting on the active role of counter-hegemonic digital media in social protests. This topic could be examined in other contemporary 21st-century literature. This approach allows for a more in-depth examination of the suppression of various social and political movements by authoritarian governments. Furthermore, it would be valuable to critically discuss the emergence of counter-hegemonic movements opposing authoritarian regimes and the rise of anti-establishment movements in response to neoliberalism, which has triggered a massive cycle of protests against the police and military forces employed by Chilean authoritarian governments.

Through the lens of a historical analogy between the play and the military governments that disseminated political montages for propaganda purposes against libertarian movements, the analysis of *Los culpables* focuses on how the play helps us understand the ongoing conflicting issues in Chile, such as various political montages against anti-authoritarian voices, including Mapuche movements and anarchists. Another critical issue developed by Morales in *Los culpables* is the high officials' military actions against the character of *The Chief's* political montage, which harms innocent citizens and connects to recent politicians' and military corruption and violent repression in Chile. A notable example is the imprisonment of high-ranking military and police officers for corruption and crimes against citizens. These cases sparked widespread discontent and a refusal among citizens to accept the failure of the Chilean government, along with military and police authorities, to take full responsibility for their subordinates' blameworthy actions against the country and its people.

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