

Uruguay, 1968: Student Activism from Global Counterculture to Molotov Cocktails

Vania Markarian, Oakland: University of California Press, 2017, 256 pp.

As the 50th anniversary of 1968 approaches, we can expect a series of public memorializations and scholarly publications on that tumultuous year. 1968 witnessed social and cultural upheavals on global scale, from Montevideo to Paris, and from Berkeley to Prague. As a seemingly spontaneous yet simultaneous series of youth and student revolts, the year resonates on a global scale but also as iconic event in discrete national histories. In Mexican popular memory, 1968 serves as a watershed moment, when the Partido Institucional Revolucionario demonstrated its violent undercurrents in the suppression of protests prior to the Summer Olympic Games. In France, the protests of May shocked a political system governed by post-World War II alliances, ushering in a period of political reform. One could go on. Vania Markarian's book, *Uruguay, 1968: Student Activism from Global Counterculture to Molotov Cocktails*, is a welcome addition to the burgeoning historical scholarship on 1968 and its surrounding events. Indeed, Markarian explicitly employs a novel transnational framework, what practitioners have come to describe as the "Global Sixties", to analyze Uruguayan social and political history. The author examines youth mobilizations of that year, centered in Montevideo, within the context of a global expansion of education, the rise of new media and youth cultures, and the Cold War polarization of politics. These transnational processes shaped national histories in distinct ways and *Uruguay, 1968* adeptly integrates an analysis of local historical change within this broader constellation of politics.

Employing a thematic organization, *Uruguay, 1968* is divided into three, broad chapters respectively titled, "Mobilizations", "Discussions", and "Cultural Expressions" and includes an introduction and conclusion along with a brief forward by Eric Zolov, a cultural historian of 1960s Mexico and theorist of the "Global Sixties" framework. Originally published in Argentina in 2012 as *El 68 uruguayo: El movimiento estudiantil entre molotovs y música beat*, this version, translated to English by Laura Pérez Carrara, is published by the University of California Press and forms part of the «Violence in Latin

American History» Series edited by Pablo Picatto, Federico Finchelstein, and Paul Gillingham.

Chapter One, "Mobilizations", provides a narrative history of the student and labor demonstrations of 1968. Similar to events in Mexico City in that same year, protests in Montevideo began over bus fare increases and then escalated into mounting cycles of protest and government repression. Student deaths, such as those of Líber Arce, shot by the police in August of that year, served as catalysts for increasing student radicalization and protest. Markarian points to the broad parallels with movements elsewhere, such as those in Brazil, in which government repression contributed to the escalation of protests, while noting the singularities of the Uruguayan experience.

Chapter Two, "Discussions", highlights debates within the Uruguayan Left and gives particular attention to the evolving ideas and political practice of the Partido Comunista Uruguayo (PCU). The PCU and its youth organization, the Unión de Juventudes Comunistas (UJC), played a leading role in the events of 1968 and Markarian's close reading of Left debates allows her to examine the classic tensions between Old and New Left politics and the various theories of revolution of the day, such as the rise of the Guevarist "foco" model of guerrilla warfare and its Uruguayan interpretation most prominently developed by the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional-Tupamaros. The author examines theoretical debates concerning the role of students in revolutionary struggle that took place both within the PCU and the broader student organization it intervened in, the Federación de Estudiantes Universitarios del Uruguay (FEUU). The PCU, in Markarian's accounting, appears both responsive to and adept at evolving with the newfound radicalism of youth. This is perhaps one of the unique features of 1968 in Uruguay, as other Communist Parties in the Americas struggled to keep up with the insurgent youth of the era.

"Cultural Expressions", the third and by far most compelling chapter, delves into the relationship between Left politics and countercultural practices, which have all too often been counterposed in memoirs of the era and much of the existing scholarship. Instead, Markarian demonstrates how the two mutually reinforced each other in the Uruguayan case. Through an examination of youth publications, such as the magazine *Los Huevos del Plata*, Markarian demonstrates how Uruguayan youth transformed existing Left and intellectual cultures. In addition, through profiles of individual activists, as well as art and poetry associated with

the protest movement, the author examines changing ideas regarding gender roles and sexuality during the period. This section pairs well with recent work such as Valeria Manzano's *The Age of Youth in Argentina: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality from Perón to Videla* that deals with similar questions in neighboring Argentina.

Throughout this concise volume, Markarian is concerned with establishing the contingency of 1968 as a historical moment in its own right, rather than a mere precursor to the rise of authoritarian rule in Uruguay (1973-1985). To achieve this the author draws primarily on archival materials held in Uruguayan national and university archives, as well as a series of periodicals, popular music, and films of the era. Her focus on the relationship between new youth cultural practices and political activism is a key strength of the book. Indeed, the detailed treatment of the Uruguayan Left and counterculture offers a model for examining the relationship between cultural practices and political radicalization elsewhere during the period in question.

Far too often, the work of Latin American historians publishing in Spanish has remained untranslated for English-language audiences. This work is a welcome corrective to that intellectual inequality. Yet perhaps because of this fact, the broader context of Uruguayan history, from the Jorge Pacheco government (1967-1972) to the rise of the Frente Amplio (1971), remains at times unclear for non-specialists. As such, major events and figures of the era could use more narrative explanation. The protests surrounding the 1967 Organization of American States meetings, held in resort town of Punta del Este, beg for more analysis, as they figure both in the Uruguayan story as well as the broader Global Sixties narrative. In addition, some of the historiographical debates the author creatively intervenes in are only laid out explicitly in the conclusion. Foregrounding those interpretive and political dilemmas earlier in the text might allow the reader to better follow Markarian's creative line of analysis. These minor limitations aside, *Uruguay, 1968* deftly brings to light the local experiences of a global revolt.

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