
Vania Markarian (2012)

El 68 uruguayo: el movimiento estudiantil entre molotovs y música beat

Bernal: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes Editorial, 168 pp.

Reviewed by Ana María Alarcón

New University of Lisbon

Vania Markarian's book analyzes the emergence of youth as a differentiated political force in Uruguay in the late 1960s. Focusing on young people's role within left-wing political spheres, the author brilliantly captures the essence of debates about being a revolutionary, the use of violence as a revolutionary method, and the value of words versus actions in the struggle to achieve socio-political change. Markarian presents 1968 as a breaking moment for Uruguayan politics, highlighting the outburst of violence within student protests as a consequence of the increasingly repressive measures enforced by president Jorge Pacheco with the support of the United States. Concentrating on the student movement of Montevideo 1968, the author skillfully threads his way through the complex and changing fabric of left-wing youth militancy. Based on historical analysis, the book presents this fabric as an entangled point of convergence of different, and sometimes conflicting elements, including globally circulating forms of cultural rebellion, globally circulating ideas on the meaning of "being young" and "behaving

as a young person," heroic views of political militancy, and young people's experience in the protests of 68.

Uruguayan historian Vania Markarian holds degrees from Columbia University (Ph.D.) and from the Universidad de la República (B.A.), in Montevideo, the institution where she currently works. Markarian has an extensive list of publications on Latin American contemporary history dealing with issues like Latin American human rights and left-wing political militancy, U.S. foreign policy in the region, and Uruguay's political exiles. Her book *El 68 Uruguayo* is grounded in periodical publications, university council minutes, documents from the recently accessible archive of the National Directorate of Information and Intelligence of Uruguay (DNII) and, to a lesser extent, in interviews and young militants' artistic and literary works. The title of the book should not be read as a literal indication of its content. Although beat music occupies a prominent place in this title, it is not explored in depth as a separate issue but as part of an overall group of circulating youth cultural forms.

Discussions on music are indeed present in Markarian's narrative yet they are infrequent. Beat music, for instance, is only mentioned on a few occasions throughout the text. However, if read figuratively, this title points to Markarian's argument for the role of music and other emergent youth cultural practices as young people's points of entry into political militancy, and as means for the construction of new spaces of power by and for the youth.

The book is divided into three chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. The introduction includes an overview of the years preceding, and the issues leading up to the student protests of Montevideo 68. Starting in the late 50s, the author shows the relationship among Uruguay's increasing socio-economic crisis, the inability of the government to respond, and the youth's lost of trust in both existing political institutions and mechanisms as means of resolution. The reader is shown how debates on the revolution as the avenue of transformation start to take place within the young left, something also ignited by the Cuban Revolution, by the growing popularity of both Che Guevara's texts and heroic revolutionary figure, as well as by the increasing interference of the U.S. in Uruguayan internal issues.

Chapter 1 offers a detailed account of the six-month protests that developed in Montevideo from May 1968. Showing the emergence of these protests in the hands of secondary education students, their subsequent lead by university and high-school students, and the adhesion of

workers' unions to this process, the author delineates the relationship between the unprecedented repressive tactics applied by Pacheco's government to contain the protests, and the radicalization of students' positions on the use of violence to reach sociopolitical transformation. The chapter conveys specific modes of protesting emerging from the youth, associated with globally circulating patterns of youth behavior, with which young militants were able to transform public space into their own political stage. These include protesting late at night, protesting downtown, and staging "speedy protests"¹ that demanded a good physical condition to run off from police.

Chapter 2 covers the history of two of the main student organizations involved in the protests (CESU and FEUU). It reveals how they underwent a process of change shaped by the affluence of new members and their experiences protesting. Based on DNII documents, Markarian also examines internal discussions and disagreements within left-wing student groups on the meaning of being a revolutionary, the ways of the revolution, or the importance of students' agency in a revolutionary context. Finally, the author addresses the complex situation within the Communist Party of Uruguay (CP), given its official reformist position and the increasingly belligerent approach of its younger members, grouped as the Union of Communist Youths (CY).

1 „protestas relámpago“

In chapter 3 Markarian shows how a positive image of revolutionary endeavors was forged through music, texts, film and theater, focusing, among others, in singer songwriter Daniel Viglietti's LP Songs for the New Man. Both the visual component and the lyrics of songs in this album are analyzed under the light of their direct point of inspiration: Che Guevara's ideas on "the new man." Left-wing student Íbero Gutiérrez's texts and paintings are used, together with the underground magazine Huevos de Plata, to illustrate the confluence of conflicting elements in young militants' lives and artistic work. These elements include beat music, catholic beliefs, left-wing political struggles, the use of violence, and the importance of words and actions for the revolution. Throughout the chapter Markarian highlights the importance of the CP and the CY as points of encounter for people from very different sectors of the Uruguayan society, in spite of the CP's initial inability to recognize young people as a differentiated political force, and of their diffused views on the role of women's militancy.

This book can be read by both specialists and non-specialists alike. It is a perfect fit for social sciences and humanities courses, as well as for student organizations and organizations in the education sector. Concerning music studies, even if the text is not centered on music it does point to a number of issues that are of great interest to this field. Besides providing a general context for researchers focused on the Uruguayan 68 and the emergence of the "new left," Markarian points to the

importance of the CY for the circulation of global cultural products, including music, and to its influence on the symbolic value of certain musical practices as acts of rebellion. The book deals with aspects, which, in the future, could be looked at in a transnational context such as the translation of song lyrics by left-wing militants in underground periodical magazines, and the sometimes conflicting relationship between the guitar (in the context of protest music) and the rifle as instruments of political change. Due to its title, the book generates great interest in the sound of the Uruguayan street protests of 68, an avenue onto which it opens the door for upcoming projects.