Imagining the Tupamaros: Resistance and Gender in Uruguayan and U.S. Revolutionary Movements, 1960s-1980s

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IMAGINING THE TUPAMAROS:
RESISTANCE AND GENDER IN URUGUAYAN AND U.S.
REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS, 1960S-1980S

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A Dissertation submitted to the
Department of History
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded:
Spring Semester, 2010
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first and foremost thank Robinson Herrera for his unflagging support and input concerning this project. From the first semester I began my coursework in the History Department in 2006, Robinson spent countless hours not only helping me to better develop my dissertation but also as a scholarly mentor. He has challenged me to conceptualize history differently and because of his guidance I have improved both my research and writing abilities. I am deeply indebted to him for giving so much of his time to helping me to improve this dissertation, challenging me to look at different sources and approaches and always pushing me to do my best.

I am also incredibly thankful to my other committee members, Alex Aviña, Brenda Cappuccio, Andrew Frank and Ed Gray who, through their suggestions concerning sources and variant ways to look at my dissertation, have also helped to greatly enhance this project. I would also like to extend a special thanks to Elna Green and Matt Childs who have been very supportive of my academic career.

The overseas and in-country research I conducted for this dissertation would not have been possible without outside funding. Special thanks to the Graduate School at Florida State University for awarding me the International Dissertation Semester Research Fellowship for the Spring and Summer semesters of 2009. This fellowship allowed me to conduct research in Uruguay and Argentina. I also was able to initiate greater research into the US side of solidarity in both 2007 and 2008 because of the Mary Lily Research Grant from Duke University. Thanks especially to Kelly Wooten at the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture at Duke University for supporting my work.

My family and friends have helped me immensely throughout this process. Thank you Mom and Dad for being incredibly steadfast and supporting me in every way imaginable. Nana, just like when I was growing up, thank you for being there for me and listening to me vent. Jess, my best friend, I have really appreciated your words of encouragement! Also I want to say thank you to Jamie, Eileen and Sherri for helping me
to stay positive. And last but certainly not least, a million thanks to my dear Jeremy for the seemingly never ending amount of patience and kindness he has shown me throughout this process.
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ABSTRACT

Using sources located in archives and special collections in Argentina, Uruguay and the United States, this dissertation challenges long held assumptions about the Uruguayan Tupamaros. I employ the methodologies of social and cultural history and feminist scholarship to examine the relationship between state repression and revolutionary resistance, the transnational connections between the Uruguayan Tupamaros and leftist groups in the US as well as issues of gender and sexuality within radical movements. I argue that the Tupamaros engaged in an active discussion with US-based revolutionaries. Focusing on the perspective of Latin Americans during the Cold War, this dissertation examines what the Uruguayan left thought about US politics and culture. I uncover that the Uruguayan left saw the US as two Americas. They criticized the US government but allied with many of its people. This occurred both in the imagination of Uruguayans and in real life connections forged between leftists. While scholars have primarily explored Cuba’s influence on the North American left, I focus on the ways in which the Uruguayan left (particularly the Tupamaros) shaped the activism of US leftists. This study also adds to the discussion of gender and sexuality in Latin America as I investigate whether or not gender reorganization represented a true political goal of the Tupamaros or if their inclusion of women primarily constituted revolutionary rhetoric. While most of the Uruguayan left focused on motherhood as inspiring women’s politics, the Tupamaros disdained traditional constructions of femininity for female combatants. Therefore, although at times problematic, the Tupamaros offered women a new avenue for political participation.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Como el Uruguay no hay! There is nothing like Uruguay!”

On a sunny January morning in 1971, British Ambassador Geoffrey Jackson rode to his embassy in Montevideo, Uruguay to meet with a visiting businessman. Just a few moments before he arrived at the British Embassy, a red van emerged from a side street and rammed into Jackson’s vehicle. To Jackson’s horror, when his driver Hugo got out of the car to survey the damage, a young man ran from the van and struck the driver over the head. Seconds after Hugo was knocked unconscious, urban guerrillas holding machine guns surrounded Jackson. Even a seemingly innocent bystander pulled out a gun that had been concealed in a fruit basket. After shooting into Jackson’s car, four young guerrillas brazenly climbed in, blindfolded Jackson and injected him with tranquilizers. After a bumpy car ride and a subsequent forced descent into what seemed like an underground fortress, Jackson’s kidnappers finally removed his blindfold. Obviously amused, one of the numerous masked men and women who surrounded Jackson asked him in English, “And who do you think we are?” Jackson, who had heard stories about his controversial kidnappers replied, “We all know that.” The captors wanted more. “But say so,” they insisted, “say so, use the word.” Jackson paused then finally answered, “Of course…the Tupamaros.”


3 Jackson, Surviving the Long Night, 39. The Tupamaros derived their name from the Andean revolutionary Tupáč Amaru, born José Gabriel Condorcanqui. Tupamaro was used to identify the militants of the Uruguayan Movimiento para la Liberación Nacional (MLN-T). Tupáč Amaru organized one of the most impressive rebellions against Spanish colonization. Amaru and his followers’ revolt lasted from November 4, 1780, when his followers kidnapped a representative of the Spanish Crown, to May 18, 1782, when Amaru was executed in Cuzco. See Alain Labrousse, The Tupamaros: Urban Guerrillas in Uruguay (England: Penguin Books, 1973), 15.
For over half a year Jackson lived in a small dank underground cell that the Tupamaros deemed the “people’s prison.” During this time, Jackson met dozens of gun wielding male and female revolutionaries. Indeed, in a memoir about his experiences as a prisoner of the Tupamaros, Jackson most consistently and disdainfully mentioned, *Tupamaras* (term used to describe female members of the Movimiento de la Liberación Nacional (MLN-T) who guarded his cell. For the very traditional Jackson, beyond merely guarding his cell, the Tupamaras’ extensive training in guns and other weaponry deviated from proper notions of feminine behavior. The relatively high number of women involved in the Tupamaros as well as their participation in violent acts such as kidnapping and bank robberies gives the impression that the group consistently supported gender equality. However, day to day realities for female militants in the Tupamaros proved to be much more complex than Jackson’s simplistic assessments. Phallocentric ideas concerning “proper” masculine revolutionary behavior within the MLN-T often coexisted alongside notions of gender liberation.

This dissertation constitutes the first in-depth analysis of the role of female MLN-T militants and the various contradictions within their participation. I investigate how the Tupamaras combated patriarchy and how gender structures in the organization compared with the role of women in Uruguayan society. I demonstrate how issues of gender and sexuality permeated almost all representations of women in the MLN-T. The Tupamaros, the Uruguayan left in general, human rights groups in the United States (US) and the Uruguayan government all had specific conceptions of what it meant to be a female militant. In addition, I further demystify the Tupamaro guerrillas by examining the transnational connections between the Tupamaro revolutionaries and leftist groups in the US. I reveal how the Tupamaros and the Uruguayan left formed connections with their counterparts in the US and the transnational nature of these alliances.

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5 My work primarily examines the Tupamaros but also looks at the Uruguayan left in general. While the Uruguayan left and the Tupamaros are not interchangeable, many Uruguayan leftists admired the actions of the Tupamaros. The Tupamaros derived from dozens of disparate leftist groups and each element read similar newspapers and participated in similar discourse. See Labrousse, *The Tupamaros, 145 and Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (MLN-T), Documentos y Antecedentes: Documento No. 5* (December 1970), 6-8. Biblioteca Nacional. Montevideo, Uruguay. Hereafter cited as BNU.

6 For the purposes of this dissertation, I define those on the “left,” broadly, as supporting social change in order to create a more egalitarian society. This includes concern for the empowerment of workers and often other historically marginalized social groups as well as a disdain for plutocracy.
In addition to previously unexplored transnational contacts and networks, this dissertation reveals the specific imagined conceptions that the Uruguayan and US left developed about each other. Indeed, Uruguay presents a fascinating case because of its citizens’ frequent interactions with the shared world of print. In 1970, the Uruguayans had a ratio of 310 periodicals for every 1000 citizens. Such a wide circulation of written materials enabled middle class members of the Uruguayan left and the Tupamaros to imagine themselves as part of a larger community of international leftist radicals.

**The Setting**

By the end of the 1960s, the US left had turned to international revolutionaries and liberation movements, particularly those in the so-called Third World, in order to inspire their own militants. Instead of homegrown national heroes, only those violently fighting against US imperialism appeared sufficient to inspire leftists’ political goals. Inspiration from international, pro-violence radicals and movements derived in large part from improvements in print technology and lower cost printing options which allowed for the worldwide distribution of pamphlets and books. State funding in communist countries helped support the international circulation of leftist materials in numerous countries. Both Cuba and China participated in aggressive publishing and distribution campaigns and focused a great deal of their attention on the Western Hemisphere. By the mid 1960s, inexpensive copies of Mao Zedong’s Little Red Book and the writings of Fidel Castro, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin, Karl Marx, Joseph Stalin, and Ernesto “Che” Guevara could be found in every big city and college town in

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9 For this dissertation I define “radical” movements and people as those that hope for fundamental, abrupt and drastic changes to current political and societal norms. Uruguayan and US radicals refused to work within their governments’ systems and called for alternative solutions, often through the use of violence. See for example “Poder Negro,” *Cuadernos de Marcha*, no. 12 (April 1968): 1. Centro de Documentacion e Investigación de la Cultura de Izquierdas. Buenos Aires, Argentina. Hereafter cited as CEDINCI.

the US. In *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism and the Making of a Third World Left*, Cynthia Young discusses the phenomenon of transnational literature and heroes inspiring leftist activism. She writes, “The greater circulation of radical literature from around the globe depended on print and media technologies, national infrastructures and transnational networks that, in a very real sense, shrank the distance between national contexts and the people in them.”

Within Uruguay, leftists such as the Tupamaros also participated in the invocation of both national and international heroes for inspiration. In a letter written to the Uruguayan leftist publication *Marcha*, one activist called upon the memory of independence hero José Artigas as well as Che, Castro, Brazilian revolutionary Carlos Lamarca, Vietnamese guerrillas and the US-based Black Panthers. This letter exemplifies how members of the Uruguayan left passionately spoke about international radical groups and individuals and hoped to express solidarity with others working for revolutionary social change. Networks of radicals emerged in large part because of leftist activism within the burgeoning university population. In Uruguay specifically, between 1955 and 1975 the number of students receiving university educations increased by 117 percent. The university offered a forum for Uruguayan and US leftists to organize and debate various strategies and ideologies. Furthermore, middle class students in Uruguay and the US turned to leftist politics in part because they viewed their countries’ once democratic ideals as disintegrating into a quagmire of repression and violence due to Cold War politics and neo-liberal economic policies. Indeed, both the US and Uruguay have traditionally been portrayed

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as beacons of democracy in an unstable hemisphere.\textsuperscript{17} However, according to reports from the leftist media, by the late 1960s universities in the US and Uruguay had transformed into sites of intense government repression of students and other suspected subversives.\textsuperscript{18}

An important aspect of the transformation of the Uruguayan left during the 1960s concerned moving towards more violent means of political expression in order to challenge the increasingly repressive Uruguayan government. Like many throughout the world who came to support violent means of political action during the 1960s, the MLN-T criticized the left for its insularity and over reliance on theoretical debates.\textsuperscript{19} According to the Tupamaros, who first emerged in 1963, the “old” Uruguayan left had failed to change society through manifestos and electoral solutions. Indeed, the Tupamaros knew that the left in Uruguay never received more than 10\% of the vote in national elections.\textsuperscript{20} For example, in the 1962 national elections, the Uruguayan Communist Party received 3.6\% of the vote and the socialist led Union Popular only 2.3\%.\textsuperscript{21} Partially due to the left’s lack of electoral success, the MLN-T argued that direct and violent political action represented the best way to challenge the Uruguayan government.

The Tupamaros also believed that Uruguay’s economic crisis offered the group a chance to ally with the Uruguayan people. For example, in the early 1950s, Uruguay’s yearly export earnings totaled over US $240 million, but by the end of the decade earnings had decreased to US $132 million. This economic downturn occurred in large part because of the cessation of the Korean War and the stagnation of industrial growth. During this time, wages also decreased while inflation grew.\textsuperscript{22} In order to fix the country’s dire economic problems, in 1958, the newly elected Blanco party (which had triumphed over


\textsuperscript{20} Arrarás, “Armed Struggle,” 72.


the Colorados after 93 years of defeat) implemented laws inspired by economic liberalism ostensibly in order to manage the flailing economy.\(^{23}\) However, these policies seemed to only contribute to more unemployment in Uruguay. The second Blanco administration, after seeing the failed policies of their predecessors, attempted other measures such as increasing state expenditures, which also did little to improve the economy.\(^{24}\) Indeed, in 1959, six Uruguayan pesos equaled one US dollar. By November 1967, the rate rose to 200 pesos per dollar and by October 1970 Uruguayan pesos sold for as much as 400 per one US dollar.\(^{25}\) Therefore, according to the Tupamaros and many other Uruguayans, government solutions proved ineffectual at ending the economic crisis. The ineptitude of the government inspired the Tupamaros to take radical measures in order to change the increasingly dire economic and political situation in Uruguay.

Besides the economic crisis, the Cuban Revolution also had an important impact on the radicalization of the Uruguayan left. As early as 1961, Uruguayan students protested the expulsion of Cuban ambassador Mario García Incháustegui from the country and their government’s support of Cuba’s ejection from the Organization of American States (OAS). Also in 1961, after Che Guevara gave a speech at the Universidad de la República in Montevideo, demonstrators and the police clashed, killing a man. The Uruguayan military further continued to show their disdain for Cuban politics by stopping a crowd of sympathizers who went to bid farewell to Cuban diplomats at the airport. In protest, students, along with all sectors of Uruguayan society, held meetings and marched in solidarity with the Cuban Revolution. In these early meetings, Uruguayan students became radicalized and began to rethink the effectiveness of electoral solutions.\(^{26}\)

Alongside the politicization of students in the 1960s, Uruguayan unions organized strikes and marches in increasingly large numbers. In response to organized labor, the Uruguayan government declared an internal “state of siege” several times, first in 1963 during an Electric Company workers strike. Conveniently, within the next few years, government declared “state of sieges” coincided with the marches of the Unión de Trabajadores Azucareros de Artigas (UTAA) and strikes of other state and

\(^{23}\) Colorado Party members have typically been more urban, liberal and anti-clerical than the predominately rural Blancos and consequently much more successful in Uruguayan politics. For more see Luis Eduardo Gonzalez, Political Structures and Democracy in Uruguay (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

\(^{24}\) Finch, An Economic History, 227.

\(^{25}\) Labrousse, The Tupamaros, 45.

\(^{26}\) Arrarás, “Political Learning,” 50.
bank employees. Thus, for leftist activists, the reactions of the Uruguayan government to the people’s solidarity with Cuba as well as their repression of organized labor demonstrated the beginnings of a future authoritarian police state. This inspired many in the Uruguayan left to rethink their current political tactics. The support or rejection of tactics used to implement the Cuban Revolution also inspired schisms in the Uruguayan left.

Factions of the Uruguayan left, such as the Communist and Socialist parties, applauded the Cuban Revolution but also expressed opposition to armed struggle in their country. According to the Uruguayan Communists and Socialists, the left needed to create a popular front and search for electoral solutions to the problems within Uruguay. Opposition to traditional Communist and Socialist organizations came from activists in groups such as the Movimiento Revolucionario Oriental (MRO), disillusioned young people in the socialist party and communists who formed the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR). Founded in 1961, members of the MRO expressed solidarity with the Cuban Revolution and supported the use of guerrilla tactics in Uruguay. Furthermore, young former communists disavowed the Uruguayan Communist Party’s theories of non-violence and their alliance with the Soviet Union. Denouncing the Soviet Union as fraudulent and bureaucratic, disillusioned young communists found inspiration in the Cuban and Chinese Revolutions and in turn formed the MIR. Similarly, disenchanted members of the Socialist Party also rejected the electoral left, citing its powerlessness to fight against the repressive Uruguayan state. These groups all expressed disillusionment with the poor electoral showing of the Uruguayan left and argued that conventional political solutions failed to truly confront the Uruguayan government.

Members of the UTAA also challenged traditional leftist politics in Uruguay. In the early 1960s, socialist attorney and future founder of the Tupamaros Raúl Sendic joined with the UTAA to act as their legal representative. Under his direction, the UTAA launched two strikes, the second of which received a response from the management of one company, who signed an agreement with the UTAA and

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28 For more on how fear of the power of organized labor inspired the rise of dictatorships in the southern cone see Paul W. Drake, *Labor Movements and Dictatorships: The Southern Cone in Comparative Perspective* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

29 Arrarás, “Political Learning,” 51.

30 Arrarás, “Political Learning,” 63.
implemented the workers’ demands. However, the union remained dissatisfied with workers’ conditions and under Sendic’s leadership, the UTAA marched to Montevideo to confront the Uruguayan parliament. The march proved futile as the government failed to respond to protestors’ pressure. In turn, Sendic suggested that union members and others from the left occupy an unused piece of land as a more radical action.\textsuperscript{31} While Sendic prepared for the occupation with the UTAA, the Uruguayan government arrested and imprisoned him in order to squelch the union’s plans.

After his release, Sendic began to see what he called the “futility” of the legal and political process. Sendic later wrote about legal institutions, “A gun well loaded gives more guarantees than the whole Uruguayan institution and laws.”\textsuperscript{32} Inspired to take a different course of action, Sendic led what most consider the Tupamaros’ first revolutionary action on July 31, 1963. Sendic, along with a few other sympathizers, “expropriated” arms from an upper class shooting club at Colonia Suiza.\textsuperscript{33} Although the getaway van overturned during the mission and the police arrested some of the people involved in the action, the left viewed the robbery as a success because they had changed their tactics from debate to violent action.\textsuperscript{34} The MLN-T followed this act with hundreds of other more successful actions, several of which other leftists admired and hoped to emulate.

Besides Sendic’s group, the Tupamaros eventually subsumed other revolutionary groups disaffected by the politics of the Uruguayan left. This included the aforementioned MRO, MIR and members of the Socialist Party. Activists specifically broke with the MRO and joined the Tupamaros after the MRO promised to use its funds to help with the UTAA’s land occupation but instead funneled resources to electoral campaigns. Tupamaro and former MRO member Eleuterio Fernández Huidobro commented about the break of the new revolutionary left with the old, “we broke with certain deep rooted vice in the Left. And it is true that the traditional Left broke with us.”\textsuperscript{35} Indeed, young leftists began to see what they believed represented the corruption of the “old” electoral left. By the mid-1960s, disaffected members from the Uruguayan left, Trotskyites, Christians and Independents also joined the Tupamaros. These varied members sought a different path of resistance than traditional leftist politics

\textsuperscript{31} Comité de Información Sobre la Represión en Uruguay, “Uruguay; los rehenes del fascismo,” 197_. NACLA 6.


\textsuperscript{33} Huidobro, Historia de los tupamaros, 80.

\textsuperscript{34} Arrarás, “Political Learning,” 66.

\textsuperscript{35} Huidobro, Historia de los tupamaros, 45.
offered. Joining former members of the UTAA, MRO and MIR, these activists allied and began to
discuss various tactics and train in self defense.\textsuperscript{36}

In 1964, in one of the MLN-T’s first known documents, the group condemned the alleged
inaction of the left by titling their paper, “No lamb ever saved itself by bleating.”\textsuperscript{37} In this document, the
group asserted the importance of armed struggle in Uruguay because of the national and economic crisis.
They chided the “old” left as misguided and alienated from the people. The Tupamaros also saw the old
left as stunted because of their over reliance on theoretical debates. At their “formal founding” at El
Pinar beach resort in 1966, the Tupamaros again reiterated their distance from the conventional
Uruguayan left.\textsuperscript{38} They argued that the Uruguayan left would never grow by engaging in armchair
debates and electoral solutions. Even if the left won the elections (which seemed improbable in the
1960s) the Tupamaros anticipated repressive forces squelching the left’s rise to political power. Instead,
according to the MLN-T, inciting true change in Uruguay required violent and direct action. Within the
next few years, the actions of the Tupamaros included bombing buildings and vehicles connected to the
US, abducting officials from several different nations, broadcasting manifestos on radio stations,
besieging the city of Pando, harassing police officers, robbing various banks and casinos and stealing
documents from a financial firm and exposing them to the public and judiciary. By the late 1960s, these
varied and frequent actions garnered support for the MLN-T and reinforced their popular nickname:
“Robin Hood.”\textsuperscript{39}

The actions of the government strengthened the public’s support of the Tupamaros. When
Uruguayan President Oscar Gestido died in December 1967 his replacement Jorge Pacheco began a
campaign against the non-communist left. Pacheco banned several leftist groups and even shut down
newspapers. In 1968, after the police responded with excessive violence during a May Day

\textsuperscript{36} Huidobro, Historia de los tupamaros, 106.

\textsuperscript{37} Huidobro, Historia de los tupamaros, 69-71.

http://www.mlntupamaros.org/materiales/breve%20historia.pdf

\textsuperscript{39} “Robin Hood,” Marcha, May 23, 1969. BNU. It is difficult to gauge how many Uruguayans actually belonged to the
underground group. By 1970, the Tupamaros contained more than a few thousand members when considering the numerous
individuals who aided the group without officially joining. These “peripheral” cells helped with propaganda, monetary issues
and recruitment. Other sympathizers supplied resources and information, medical help and sometimes offered their home and
By June, almost all university and high school students and teachers in Montevideo were on strike. Hundreds of leftists also responded violently to the police, creating barricades and confronting police with slingshots. In this tense political climate, on August 7, the Tupamaros kidnapped Ulysses Pereira Reverbel, a government official and friend of Pacheco. In response, the police occupied the Universidad del la República in Montevideo and confronted student protestors in a street battle that lasted over twelve hours. After the police killed several students, including a young man named Liber Arce (who would become a symbol of the subversion against government repression), student resistance intensified until the military occupied all universities and high schools in Montevideo.

While the condition of human rights in Uruguay steadily declined in the late 1960s, an official coup and complete cessation of democracy occurred when President Juan María Bordaberry, assisted by the Armed Forces, indefinitely suspended constitutional rights on June 1, 1973. Part of this suspension allowed for the continuous detention of those perceived as a national security threat, which was broadly interpreted as anyone who disagreed with the government’s actions. Weeks later, on June 27, Bordaberry dissolved the elected General Assembly and soon after declared all political parties and student organizations of the left illegal. The MLN-T undertook numerous operations to combat the increasingly bloody repression. However, by the end of 1973, the Uruguayan state, with the assistance of the US government, had imprisoned the majority of the Tupamaros and any others who dared to speak out against the government.

Sources and Methodology

42 Gould, “Solidarity under Siege,” 357.
This dissertation explores the social and cultural history of the Tupamaros. Using previously ignored sources located in Latin American and US archives and special collections, this dissertation reveals connections between the MLN-T and radical groups in the US through a web of seemingly disconnected archival materials. The Biblioteca Nacional del Uruguay (BNU) in Montevideo, Uruguay and the Centro de Documentacion e Investigación de la Cultura de Izquierdas en la Argentina (CEDINCI) in Buenos Aires, Argentina provided sources related to the Tupamaros and the greater Uruguayan left. The BNU housed the Uruguay publication Marcha, a newspaper edited by Carlos Quijano that was integral to leftist politics in Uruguay through 1974, as well as documents authored by the Tupamaros. The CEDINCI provided rare pamphlets, bulletins, journals and posters from the Uruguayan left. These sources contradict established thinking about the supposed lack of transnational alliances forged between US and Uruguayan revolutionaries during the 1960s through the 1980s. For example, a letter authored by the Black Panther Party (BPP) asking for financial and political support from the Uruguayan left complicates assumptions of dominance and acquiescence within US-Latin American foreign relations. The sources at the BNU and CEDINCI demonstrate that leftists in the US not only acknowledged, but in some instances initiated contact, asked for help and forged ties with the Uruguayan left. Conversely, these sources reveal the previously unexplored history of how the Uruguayan left and the Tupamaros looked specifically to the Black Power movement and the US left for revolutionary inspiration.

In August 2007 and January 2009, as a recipient of the Mary Lily Research Grant for work at the Sallie Bingham Center for Women’s History and Culture in the Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library at Duke University, I researched the US side of the process of international solidarity with the Tupamaros. Documents housed at Duke University prove the existence of an international solidarity movement, initiated by Uruguayans. Other, unique documents such as personal correspondence by feminists and human rights groups further demonstrate the transnational alliances initiated by both Uruguayans and radicals in the US. The Uruguay papers from the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) enabled an examination of how the Tupamaros influenced the imagination and activism of the US left.

This study relies on the methodology of social history. My work interrogates the structure of the Tupamaros and the belief systems of leftist activists in the US and Uruguay. To better understand the sources and to move beyond the propaganda that the Tupamaros and others generated, I employ the
methodology of reading sources “against the grain” in order to glean a clearer picture of power relations.⁴⁶ By looking at sources in a creative way I discovered that the relationship between the left in Uruguay and the US defied conventional binaries of dominance and acquiescence. What emerges is a much more complicated relationship, influenced not only by politics but also by culture.

This dissertation uses Joan Scott’s definition of gender as a category of historical analysis in order to explore the nuances of gender and power constructions in all the sources utilized.⁴⁷ Approaching gender as culturally contingent and socially constructed, my work analyzes structures of masculinity and femininity and how they influenced the discourse of the Tupamaros and the greater Uruguayan left. Therefore, my work does not feature “gender” as a separate section of the dissertation but rather employs analysis of the nuances of gender and power throughout every chapter.

Feminist scholar Judith Butler’s assertions of gender as a performance also influenced my approach to the construction of femininity and masculinity among the Tupamaros. According to Butler, there exists no “original” gender or sexuality—all function as an impersonation of some sort, an act that has been reinstituted and imitated throughout time.⁴⁸ Therefore, while the dominant discourse in Uruguay supported notions of gender as an intrinsic phenomenon, constructions of masculinity and femininity in the Tupamaros exemplified the ways in which gender represents a type of performance. Indeed, in order to be accepted as viable militants, the Tupamaras needed to lose their femininity and “perform” masculine gender roles. Furthermore, my analysis of gender employs María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo’s work The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development, which suggests that revolutionary icons of the 1960s and 70s shared notions of masculinist transformation while attempting to transcend ethnic identity. Saldaña-Portillo posits, “The whole guerrilla experience served as a trope for fantasmatic recuperation of

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⁴⁶ Originating in discussions of critical theory, reading sources “against the grain” allows historians to resist master narratives and conventional mechanisms of interpretation. By reading “against the grain,” historians are able to move beyond the superficial public transcript of “what happened” and see a clearer picture of complex power relations. See James Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1990), 2. For a discussion of the production of documents and ways in which historians can approach historical sources see Kathryn Burns, “Notaries, Truth, and Consequences,” The American Historical Review, 110, no. 2 (April 2005): 350-79.


full masculinity.” Building on this characterization of revolution and gender, I argue that the Tupamaros idealized transformative masculine identity and also ignored racial and ethnic differences in the name of the MLN-T’s political struggle.

**Historiography**

This dissertation contributes to the social and cultural historiography of the Cold War, US-Latin American foreign relations, and gender history. Over the last twenty years, historians have continued to move away from simplistic political models in order to better understand the history of US-Latin American foreign relations. Influenced by the rise of postmodern and subaltern studies, these scholars argue for more complex and inclusive narratives in the study of international relations. For example, in the 1998 edited collection *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of US-Latin American Relations*, Gilbert Joseph et al employ the word “encounter” to describe the multiple discourses and interactions between historical actors in the US and Latin America. Rejecting the master narratives that have plagued the study of US-Latin American foreign relations (such as Dependency Theory) *Close Encounters of Empire* focuses on cultural and social issues and examines lesser known historical figures.

Other more recent scholarship such as Alan McPherson’s *Yankee No! Anti-Americanism in US-Latin American Relations* (2003) explores the complex relationships between those in Latin America and the US, with a focus on the beliefs of so-called everyday Latin Americans. McPherson posits that anti-Americanism in Latin America manifested in a multitude of ways for different groups of people.

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Indeed, McPherson’s work demonstrates that US-Latin American foreign relations did not and does not consist of anti-Americanism versus simplistic acceptance of US policies and culture.\footnote{McPherson, \textit{Yankee No!}, 5.}

Despite more nuanced studies of US-Latin American relations in recent years, many of these works focus largely on the impact and importance of Cuba.\footnote{See for example Van Gosse, \textit{Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America and the Making of a New Left} (London: Verso, 1993); Cynthia A. Young, \textit{Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of A US Third World Left} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) and Max Elbaum, \textit{Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che} (New York: Verso Press, 2002). A notable exception is Emily Hobson, “Imagining Alliance: Queer Anti-imperialism and Race in California, 1966-1990” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2009). While focusing some on Cuba, Hobson primarily explores the perspective of US homosexual activists and their acts of solidarity with Central America, particularly Nicaragua.} For example, Van Gosse’s \textit{Where the Boys Are: Cold War America and the Making of a New Left} and more recently Cynthia Young’s \textit{Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism and the Making of a Third World Left} explore how the Cuban Revolution influenced US leftists.\footnote{For the role of specific groups within the US left such as the Black Panthers and their relationship with Cuba see Mark Sawyer, \textit{Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba} (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 79-101; Rose Thevein, “‘Boundaries of Law and Disorder’: The Grand Design of Eldridge Cleaver and the Overseas Revolution in Cuba” in \textit{Diasporic Africa: A Reader}, ed. Michael A. Gomez (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 219-250 and Carlos Moore, \textit{Castro, The Blacks and Africa} (Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Afro-American Studies, 1988).} In \textit{Where the Boys Are}, Van Gosse argues that the Cuban Revolution excited young scholars and helped to inspire the activism of the US left during the 1960s. Similarly, in her work \textit{Soul Power} Young posits that Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution had a significant impact on the US left’s international solidarity movement with the “Third World.” This influence ranged from African American cultural and political alliances with Cuba to Black Nationalist’s distrust of Communist Cuba’s rhetoric of racial equality.\footnote{Young, \textit{Soul Power}, 41.}

While Cuba remains the focus for historians of US-Latin American foreign relations and the political left, sparse scholarship has emerged that examines the connections between the Uruguayan left and the US. One such example is political scientist Vania Markarian’s monograph \textit{Left in Transformation: Uruguayan Exiles and the Latin American Human Rights Networks, 1967-1984} which explores international human rights campaigns concerning Uruguay during the period of authoritarian rule.\footnote{Vania Markarin, \textit{Left in Transformation: Uruguayan Exiles and the Latin American Human Rights Networks, 1967-1984} (New York: Routledge, 2005), 2.} In \textit{Left in Transformation}, Markarian examines the transnational networks created throughout the
world by Uruguayan exiles and human rights groups such as Amnesty International. Focusing on mainstream groups and organizations, Markarian argues that the Uruguayan left participated in a political discourse that included a language of human rights due in part to the alliances they forged with human rights groups while in exile.

In addition to changes in the study of US-Latin American relations, in the last decade, scholars of the Cold War have started to re-imagine the relationship between Latin America and the US during the last half of the twentieth century. Current trends in scholarship reject rigid geopolitics and examine grassroots movements and previously marginalized subjects such as women, workers, peasants and students as well as cultural and social identities. These works also privilege the perspective of Latin America and do not place the region in the periphery of European and US dominated Cold War politics. Therefore, within this Cold War scholarship, the aforementioned Latin American historical actors function as individuals with unique political agency.

For example, in his 2004 work *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War*, Greg Grandin rejects the narrative of the Cold War in Latin America as a battle between two ideologies (political liberalism and Soviet communism). Grandin instead argues that during the Cold War two

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60 Even more “traditional” scholars have altered their approach and recognized the multifaceted nature of issues in regions around the globe. See for example Robert McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).


62 Economics scholar John Kent writes about the Cold War, “In reality the Cold War originated because of global, not European, problems. The non-European areas became more important in the Cold War and by the 1960s many peripheral areas of the less developed world had assumed central significance.” John Kent, “Cold War and the Periphery” *History in Focus*, 10 (Spring 2006). http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/cold/articles/kent.html/.

images of “democracy” emerged in Latin America—one vibrant, local and egalitarian and the other influenced by US supported inequality. Therefore, by examining the experience of peasants, plantation workers and Guatemala’s homegrown Communist Party, Grandin explores how local politics and people shaped political discourse.\textsuperscript{64} More recently, works such as Gilbert Joseph and Daniela Spencer’s 2008 edited collection \textit{In from the Cold: Latin America’s New Encounter with the Cold War} also focus on the social, cultural and transnational experiences of previously marginalized human subjects during the Cold War. Building on earlier scholarship that explored the Cold War and gender issues such as Cynthia Enloe’s \textit{The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War}, Victoria Langland’s “Birth Control Pills and Molotov Cocktails: Reading Sex and Revolution in Brazil” demonstrates that gendered experiences during the Cold War must also be explored in order to include a more nuanced understanding of the power complexities of the period.\textsuperscript{65}

This dissertation contributes to new scholarship which focuses on the complexity of US-Latin American foreign relations from the perspective of Latin America during the Cold War. My work demonstrates that the relationship between leftist activists in the US and Uruguay defied simplistic binaries of subjugation and acquiescence. I present all historical actors involved in these transnational networks as active and conscious agents in both local and international politics. Privileging the perspective of Latin Americans, I posit that the Uruguayan left saw the United States as divided into two separate nations. One nation was the internal colony of workers, African Americans and students and the other the so-called imperialistic government of the United States. This imperialist government repressed both its citizens (the internal colony) and peoples throughout Latin America. Therefore, the Uruguayan left offered solidarity and hoped to ally with what they saw as an internal colony within the United States, particularly those of African descent, while at the same time critiquing US policies.\textsuperscript{66} My work

\textsuperscript{64} See Greg Grandin, \textit{The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). For other works that examine the perspective of indigenous people(s) during the Cold War see Seth Garfield, \textit{Indigenous Struggle at the Heart of Brazil} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).


demonstrates that although participants in radical movements may denounce the economic and political actions of a government, they can also forge bonds of solidarity with citizens within that same country.

While the relationship between the Tupamaros and the US left occasionally receives a brief footnote in the historiography, no extensive work had previously been undertaken about the Tupamaros’ connections with the US left. My work represents the first extended discussion of how the Tupamaros and human rights violations in Uruguay caught the attention of leftists in the United States. While previous work on Uruguay and transnationalism analyzes more mainstream organizations and the interactions of governments, particularly the US, my work examines lesser known leftist groups. I add to recent scholarship on transnationalism by focusing specifically on the Tupamaros, a group that has been overall ignored in the historiography of Latin America.

This dissertation also fits in with current trends concerning the Cold War and Latin America by emphasizing the point of view of Uruguayan radicals. While previous Cold War historiography has focused primarily on how the US viewed Latin America, my work explores how Uruguayans, as unique political agents, conceptualized themselves and the US left. Part of my analysis focuses on how the Tupamaros and the greater Uruguayan left viewed issues of gender, sexuality and revolution. Thus, this dissertation examines whether or not gender reorganization represented a true political goal of the Tupamaros or if their inclusion of women solely constituted empty rhetoric. While some scholars have looked at the role of female revolutionaries in other Latin American guerrilla groups, I explore previously ignored areas concerning gender and the Tupamaros. To date, not a single major work has asked what attracted women to the Tupamaros and whether gender reorganization represented a genuine project or simply revolutionary rhetoric. Therefore, my work contributes to Latin American gender historiography as well as scholarship on US-Latin American foreign relations and the Cold War.

**Chapter Overview**

This dissertation consists of four core chapters, chapters two through five, and an introduction and a conclusion. I begin with an exploration of how and why the Tupamaros came to occupy such an influential position in the imagination and activism of the US left. From there I examine how during the late 1960s and early 1970s the Uruguayan left and the Tupamaros offered solidarity to the US left,
particularly the Black Power movement. Next, I analyze the political strategies that US activists employed on behalf of Uruguayans under authoritarian rule. Following an analysis of the gendered forms of representations of Tupamara political prisoners by US activists, in the final core chapter I look specifically at the construction of gender roles and sexual mores in the group.

Chapter Two reveals the romanticism and representations of the Tupamaros, specifically from the perspective of the US left, during the 1960s and 70s. I explore why the Tupamaros maintained a special position of influence in the imagination and activism of the US left. Indeed, to their admirers the Tupamaros ostensibly represented a case of more “successful” revolutionaries. I posit that this occurred in large part because of the popular notion that the group had perfected the art of urban guerrilla warfare, particularly in the form of technical superiority. The film State of Siege also influenced the US left’s perception of the Tupamaros. The controversial film, which portrayed the Tupamaros in a positive manner, garnered the attention of leftists and taught a whole new audience about the politics of the MLN-T. Along with romanticism from the left, I analyze the multifaceted critiques of the Tupamaros, which demonstrate how the group pervaded both the activism and imagination of the US left. Some in the left who supported political violence also viewed the Tupamaros as lacking a sufficiently strong Marxist ideological base. Pacifist leftists objected to the Tupamaros whom they saw as fueling the fire of oppression through their violent acts.

Chapter Three shows the various ways in which the Uruguayan left conceptualized their US counterparts. Looking specifically at the Uruguayan leftist publication Marcha, I argue that both the Tupamaros and the greater Uruguayan left showed particular admiration for the Black Panther Party and other civil rights organizations in the US. Indeed, the Uruguayan left saw the US as divided into two separate and warring nations—one imperialist (the US government) and the other both oppressed and radicalized (students, the Black Power movement, etc). The Uruguayan left consistently allied itself with the oppressed “nation” in the US in hopes of overthrowing the current US government. This chapter also examines how the Tupamaros specifically consumed US leftist and Black Power cultural products such as songs and movies. However, while the primarily white, middle class Uruguayan left demonstrated solidarity for the US Black Power movement, they often ignored the very existence of those of African descent in their own country.

Chapter Four examines the multifaceted forms of US activism on behalf of Uruguay and the instances of international reciprocal connections between activists. I demonstrate that numerous types of activism emerged during the 1970s and 80s concerning Uruguay and its declining democracy. While
some US groups focused primarily on human rights issues, others criticized human rights violations and also offered leftist solidarity to Uruguayans. I demonstrate that in order to critique the authoritarian regime in Uruguay, some from the left also denounced US capitalism as well as apartheid in South Africa. These groups, however, failed to offer any form of gendered analysis of the treatment of male and female political prisoners in Uruguay and sometimes ignored the existence of women prisoners all together. Despite the overall ignorance of female political prisoners, a few activists in Uruguay reached out to groups in the US on behalf of Tupamaras.

Chapter Five investigates the construction of gender roles and sexuality within the Tupamaros and the greater Uruguayan left. I argue that while the Tupamaros undeniably opened a political space for Uruguayan women and deviated from traditional understandings of women as passive, maternal and non-violent they nevertheless marginalized female militants in other ways. My research reveals that despite the Tupamaros offering a unique mechanism for women’s public participation, the group overall denied female militants the opportunity to speak about their own liberation and required women to assume socially constructed traits of masculinity in order to participate as revolutionaries. Furthermore, while the Tupamaros and the greater Uruguayan left may have harbored somewhat more open ideas about sexuality than the rest of Uruguay, they remained nowhere near radical, especially concerning homosexuality. Indeed, during the 1960s and 70s most of the Uruguayan left reflected the views of the increasingly authoritarian government and presented homosexuality as destructive to revolution and society.

This dissertation, then, challenges long held notions about the uniqueness of the Tupamaros. It shows that rather than disconnected from leftists in the US, the Tupamaros and others in the Uruguayan left engaged in an active discussion with US-based revolutionaries. The Tupamaros influenced groups in the US and in turn, revolutionaries from the US influenced the MLN-T. Beyond issues of transnationalism, my research also illuminates the complexity of gender relations in the Tupamaros, which included both instances of liberation and subjugation for female militants.

Having laid out a foundation for the ensuing discussion, it seems appropriate to turn now to the dissertation’s core contributions. In the next chapter I explore the multifaceted representations of the Tupamaros and posit that the group occupied a special place of admiration and sometimes ire for those in the US left.
CHAPTER TWO

NOT JUST ANOTHER CUBA: THE UNIQUE REVOLUTIONARY CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE TUPAMAROS

“[There will be] a country for all, or a country for none”-Tupamaro Popular Slogan

Introduction

In a 1969 book describing the strategy and actions of the Tupamaros, Antonio Mercader and Jorge de Vera depicted MLN-T members as “Total Samurais, with muscles of steel, mentally alert, instant reflexes, an exact knowledge of weapons and resistance to pain.” This romanticized description represents one of numerous examples demonstrating the admiration that the left possessed concerning the Tupamaros. Indeed, the Tupamaros garnered international attention in the late 1960s, a time when leftists throughout the world turned to more violent means of activism in order to inspire political change. Due to their violent actions against an increasingly repressive state, for their admirers the Tupamaros represented a case of successful revolutionaries who challenged their country’s dictatorship and won the support of a large portion of the Uruguayan people. With their seemingly creative and usually dangerous actions, the group specifically garnered the attention of the left in the United States. Scholars of the left occasionally and briefly acknowledge the international impact of the Tupamaros, but their influence and importance has not been explored in depth in historical literature. Despite frequent references and stories about the Tupamaros within leftist activism, scholars have tended to focus on Cuba as the romanticized country for leftist organizations in the US in the 1960s and 70s.

While the Tupamaros performed actions not drastically different from other guerrilla groups such as the Brazilian Ação Libertadora Nacional and Cuba’s urban guerrillas, the left perceived the

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2 My translation, the original reads: “El resultado es que cada Tupamaro capaz de entrar en acción, es un complete “samurai”: músculos de acero, mente alerta, reflejos inverosímiles, dominio complete de las armas, resistencia al dolor, etc.” Antonio Mercader and Jorge de Vera, Tupamaros: Estrategia y Acción (Montevideo: Editorial Alfa, 1969), 104-105.
Tupamaros as more successful, egalitarian and creative.\textsuperscript{3} The Tupamaros’ victories occurred in part because of the Uruguayan state’s initially weak response to the group. During the 1960s, the Uruguayan government lacked the ability to repress its citizens as violently as other nations in Latin America, allowing for the Tupamaros to have more staying power and perceived successes. Indeed, due to the democratic and essentially non-violent tradition within Uruguay during the twentieth century, initially the ruling government had neither the resources to neutralize the group nor the historical framework to conceptualize their violent attacks.\textsuperscript{4}

In order to demonstrate the supposed superiority of the Tupamaros, their leftist admirers pointed to the Tupamaros’ use of urban guerrilla warfare, which included actions such as the kidnapping of several government officials (including US foreign agent Dan Mitrione) and the controversial movie about the group \textit{State of Siege}. These romantic representations enabled the Tupamaros to invade the consciousness of the action oriented left more than other urban based Latin American revolutionary groups. Thus, the left often \textit{imagined} the MLN-T as more successful and egalitarian than other revolutionaries.\textsuperscript{5} This romantic perception inspired leftists to study the tactics and practices of the group in order to start similar revolutions in their own countries. However, while idealized portrayals proved common, the left also had a wide range of reactions to the accomplishments of the Tupamaros, some of which included a critique of the group’s lack of a coherent ideology. Others rejected the MLN-T’s advocacy of violence as a proper means of societal and political change. However, even strong critics of the Tupamaros recognized the group’s achievements in their practice of urban guerrilla warfare.\textsuperscript{6}

### Urban Guerrilla Warfare


\textsuperscript{4} Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes of a similar phenomenon concerning the ruling colonial French government and its response to the Haitian revolution. He argues that no one had a plan for how to respond to slave insurrection as it was unthinkable even as it occurred. The revolution challenged Western frameworks concerning race, slavery and colonialism in the Americas. See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, \textit{Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 73-107.


\textsuperscript{6} See for example Eugene Stockwell, “Uruguay: Do We Subsidize Repression?” \textit{Christianity and Crisis} (October 2, 1972): 211. NACLA 6.
A primary reason many North American groups and movements throughout the world admired the Tupamaros was the perception that the group more successfully implemented urban guerrilla warfare tactics. Indeed, Tupamaro supporters argued that Uruguay represented an ideal place to practice urban guerrilla warfare. By the 1960s, one half of Uruguayans lived in the capital city of Montevideo and thirty percent more resided in other urban areas. The Tupamaros’ inspiration for urban guerrilla warfare derived in part from the so-called theoretical “brain” of the group, Abraham Guillén. Along with Guillén, Brazilian militant Carlos Marighella also inspired the urban guerrilla strategies of the Tupamaros and other leftists throughout the world. However, Guillén had a specific impact on and association with the Tupamaros. Though the relationship between Guillén and the Tupamaros is not completely clear, the left considered Guillén the Tupamaros’ theoretical mastermind as he wrote extensively about the group’s revolutionary development. While not an official member of the Tupamaros, in 1966 Guillén participated in series of discussions with Tupamaros and a cell of Argentine guerrillas in Montevideo. He later published his contributions to these meetings and also expressed the Tupamaros’ ideas concerning urban guerrilla warfare in a book entitled Estrategia de la guerrilla urbana. Indeed, publishing information from these meetings proved to be an important task as the group rarely articulated their theories to a larger audience.

Guillén, originally from Spain, immigrated to Argentina when he was thirty-five. He earned fame as a commentator on international politics but never joined a Marxist party. He was associated with the Uturunos leftist guerrilla movement in Northwest Argentina until the Argentine government arrested him for his involvement with the group. When he was released from jail three months later in 1962, Guillén escaped to Montevideo. There he established himself with Fidelista strategy groups but soon realized that the topography and urban demography of Uruguay was not conducive to rural

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7 Taglioretti, Women and Work, 18.

8 Marighella’s and Guillén’s ideas of urban guerrilla warfare were very similar. However, Guillén looked primarily to Uruguay while Marighella focused on Brazil. See Carlos Marighella, Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla, Trans. by Robert Moss (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1971).


11 Guillén, Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla, 8.

12 Guillén, Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla, 6.
strategies. This realization supported Guillén’s argument that topography should never be the foremost element of consideration in revolutionary movements. Instead, Guillén asserted that ultimately people make the revolution.

Guillén’s critical work, *Estrategia de la guerrilla urbana*, helped provide a theoretical model for the Tupamaros. Guillén’s notion of urban guerrilla warfare posited an alternative to Che Guevara’s ideas of guerrilla warfare in the countryside. Che’s ideas for revolution worked for Latin American countries with large rural populations; however, southern cone countries (particularly Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay) had massive urban populations if not outright urban majorities. Guillén argued that if seventy percent or more of a country’s population was urban (such as Uruguay’s) operations needed to center in the largest cities. The countryside, in turn, should support the urban guerrillas with local militias. Inspired by the actions of the Tupamaros, Guillén later contended that the group demonstrated an example of the struggle between “capitalism and socialism with its epicenter in the great cities.” Guillén even went so far as to critique the ostensibly poor strategy of carrying out a revolution in the middle of the countryside as “peasants did in the middle ages.” Guillén suggested instead that guerrillas in countries such as Uruguay and Argentina should engage in prolonged urban warfare and focus on small victories which would eventually destroy existing governments.

Large cities would ideally contain hundreds of revolutionary cells living separately but fighting together (which the Tupamaros accomplished at the height of their success). Guillén advocated that these cells of urban guerrillas rob banks and kidnap important figures for ransom. Such strategies appealed to those that lived in large cities and had trouble relating to notions of guerrilla warfare focused on the countryside. Therefore, within this symbiotic relationship, the Tupamaros came to represent

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13 The Fidelistas, inspired by Fidel Castro’s strategies in the Cuban Revolution, hoped to incite revolution by using guerrilla warfare tactics in the countryside. They planned to use rural tactics even in Uruguay, which had a primarily urban population.


16 Guillén, *Estrategia de la guerrilla urbana*, 79.


Guillén’s idea of urban warfare. Guillén also called for the union of as much as 80 percent of the population in a broad front to create revolution. Thus, revolution in Latin American urban settings also needed to include the middle class along with exploited workers and peasants. The call for a cross class alliance also fit well with the Tupamaros as the majority of the group derived from the middle class. Therefore, Guillén’s methods enticed revolutionaries dealing with variant terrain, such as cities. For Guillén, it was the Tupamaros who exemplified the best model of urban guerrilla warfare. In an English language translation of Guillén’s work, US professor Donald Hodges notes that the Tupamaros’ organizational model influenced the Quebec Liberation Front, the Black Panthers and Weather Underground. Thus, Hodges posits that these groups maintained revolutionary tactics similar to the Tupamaros in part because they too operated in what Hodges calls more “advanced” countries with similar terrain. Indeed, revolutionaries throughout the world continuously imagined the Tupamaros as more successful practitioners of urban guerrilla warfare and hoped to emulate their tactics.

**Tupamaros as Inspiration**

The Tupamaros’ inspiration of radical action spanned the globe during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The leftist West German Baader Meinhof group called themselves the “Tupamaros of West Germany” and released statements asserting that they must learn from revolutionary movements such as the Tupamaros. A group of leftist guerrillas in Greece also found inspiration from the small Uruguayan organization as they planned to overthrow the military backed government by using the tactics of the “South American Tupamaros.” Therefore, to those who admired the Tupamaros, the group offered an excellent example of the growing strength of leftist revolutionary movements.

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20 Guillén, Estrategia de la guerrilla urbana, 82.

21 See Guillén, Desafío al pentagono, esp. Chapter Three.

22 Guillén, El pueblo en armas, 47.

23 Guillén, Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla, 26.


Due to their status as international symbols of revolutionary triumph, French-born Regis Debray, who theorized about revolution and fought with Che Guevara in Bolivia, found inspiration from the Tupamaros and wrote about what he perceived as the group’s success in comparison to other revolutionary groups in Latin America. He argued that the Tupamaros represented, “The only armed revolutionary movement in Latin America who knew how, or was able, to attack on all fronts (and not only at one point or one side) and to neutralize the bourgeois and anti-national dictatorship, questioning its very survival.” 27 Thus, Debray viewed the Tupamaros as purveyors of new forms of socialist revolution. For Debray, the Tupamaros and their use of urban guerrilla warfare offered an excellent example of how the historical, social, political and cultural conditions of a country (Uruguay) should influence armed struggle. 28 Instead of relying on armchair discussions and rhetoric about liberation, the Tupamaros took actions which revealed their supposed political ideology. 29 At the same time, Debray also admitted that the group lacked a precise ideology, a public program and a true commander. However, Debray viewed these issues as positive aspects of the group. According to Debray, the Tupamaros demonstrated that their unique revolutionary hero was not an individual, but the group itself. In this way, Debray believed that the group moved away from egotistical displays of personal glory that plagued leftist organizations throughout the world. Even the press appointed leader of the group, Raúl Sendic, claimed that he simply played a combatant role similar to the other Tupamaros. 30 Debray applauded that the Tupamaros did not (publicly) support rigid hierarchies and stressed that the group was not impersonal, rigid or puritanical. Indeed, the idea of not having a central organization or commander appealed to leftists as it offered an easily followed romantic model. 31

According to Debray, the Tupamaros further deviated from other, “inferior” revolutionary groups that exhibited pompousness and childishness in both rhetoric and action. These supposedly faux revolutionaries, who lived throughout North America, Latin America and Europe, often posed under


29 MLN-T, Los Tupamaros en acción, 13.

30 MLN-T, Los Tupamaros en acción, 19.

31 The idea that the Tupamaros employed a non-hierarchal revolutionary model proved patently false. For a fuller discussion see Chapter Five.
pictures of Che or Mao in order to give their groups revolutionary credibility.\textsuperscript{32} Indeed, since the Cuban Revolution, many leftist groups in Latin America attempted to emulate Che’s and Fidel’s success but with superficiality and mere caricature. According to Debray, these movements only illustrated the personal vanity of their middle class members. In contrast, most members of the Tupamaros ignored notions of personal glory and instead created an organization where fellow militants greeted one another as equals.\textsuperscript{33} Unlike the elitist groups that Debray maligned but did not specifically name, the Tupamaros successfully reached out to and garnered support from labor unions, university students, popular movements, traditional parties and members of the church.\textsuperscript{34} Debray believed that by including “the people,” the Tupamaros altered the dichotomy between combatants and non-combatants. The movement needed the people’s involvement in the revolution—from workers who could not leave their jobs, to housewives, intellectuals and the “petit-bourgeoisie.”\textsuperscript{35} Indeed, Debray argued that these varying types of people supported the Tupamaros but did not actively join the organization. According to Debray, the Tupamaros, in contradistinction to other inferior clandestine guerrilla movements, appreciated and needed the force of the people in their struggle for liberation. Therefore, Debray viewed the Tupamaros as offering an international example of revolutionary maturity due to their constant planned actions and alliance with the majority of the people.\textsuperscript{36} Debray failed to note, however, that the Tupamaros had trouble connecting with some factions of the labor movement and other factions of the left. While they won the approval of the Sendic led UTAA and the workers of Frigorifico Fray Bentos, they did not penetrate the trade-union movement as easily.\textsuperscript{37} Thus, when describing the Tupamaros, Debray ignored or seemed unaware of fragmentation within the Uruguayan left. For Debray, the Tupamaros’ discretion in targets and actions undeniably proved a high level of prudence and exemplified important political goals which the majority of Uruguayan supported.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{32} MLN-T, \textit{Los Tupamaros en acción}, 28.

\textsuperscript{33} MLN-T, \textit{Los Tupamaros en acción}, 28.

\textsuperscript{34} MLN-T, \textit{Los Tupamaros en acción}, 30.

\textsuperscript{35} MLN-T, \textit{Los Tupamaros en acción}, 31.

\textsuperscript{36} Other practitioners or urban guerrilla warfare such as Marighella agreed with the notion of an alliance with the people. See the “Popular Support” chapter in \textit{Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla}.

\textsuperscript{37} Guillén, \textit{Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla}, 272.

\textsuperscript{38} MLN-T, \textit{Los Tupamaros en acción}, 17.
Beyond their positive standing with Debray and various revolutionary groups in Europe, the influence of the Tupamaros was particularly salient for US radicals. Several US leftist organizations employed the MLN-T’s tactics in an attempt to recreate their urban guerrilla warfare practices. One example of the influence of the Tupamaros on US leftist tactics occurred in 1970 when four radicals bombed the Army Mathematics Research Center in Wisconsin and killed one person in protest against US military action throughout the world. The radicals asserted that their actions demonstrated a conscious political action of people in solidarity with groups such as the Tupamaros.\textsuperscript{39} The White Panther Party (WPP) also derived inspiration from the Tupamaros’ strategy of kidnapping government officials in order to bargain for the release of political prisoners. The WPP considered kidnapping Vice President Agnew and other political figures like Gerald Ford and Senator Robert Griffin in order to gain the release of Black Panther Party leaders such as Bobby Seale and Huey Newton. The group also wanted to use the kidnappings in order to force the United States to withdraw from Vietnam. Thus, the WPP hoped to specifically emulate the style of the Tupamaros by planning to kidnap government officials (though their plans never came to fruition).\textsuperscript{40} Other radicals in different movements such as the US Catholic Left (usually non-violent) also found inspiration from the Tupamaros. Priests Philip and Daniel Berrigan, along with three other Catholic activists, evaded conviction for destroying draft files and moved underground in “Tupamaros-style” secrecy.\textsuperscript{41} The Tupamaros also influenced the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA), a radical group from California, who achieved most of their infamy after the kidnapping of heiress Patty Hearst in 1974. They directly utilized the Tupamaros’ so-called Robin Hood tactics and demanded food for the California poor in return for Hearst’s release. The Hearst family complied and spent millions of dollars distributing food to impoverished areas, but the SLA ultimately found the type of food offered inadequate. The SLA’s tactics mirrored the actions of the Tupamaros who robbed banks and food trucks in order to distribute money and goods to the poor.\textsuperscript{42} They also emulated the Tupamaros notion of a “people’s prison” in which the SLA tried and convicted those in positions of economic and political power. When kidnapping Hearst, whose family had committed “crimes against the people,” the SLA issued a warrant

\textsuperscript{39} “Text of the FBI Affidavit Charging Four in University of Wisconsin Bombing,” NYT, September 3, 1970.

\textsuperscript{40} “Political Kidnapping Plot Tied to White Panthers,” NYT, March 17, 1971.


for her arrest and subsequent execution if she resisted. Inspired by the Tupamaros, the SLA contended that its warrant came from the people. The notion of creating a prison as a parallel power was influenced by the Tupamaros and offered a different tribunal structure than the mainstream system which leftist groups in both Uruguay and the US deemed unfair. Indeed, Hearst herself claimed she was being held as a prisoner of war. Like the Tupamaros, the SLA viewed armed struggle as the only path to true political change and asserted that “guns [should] express the words of freedom.”

Another better known organization impacted by the strategy of the Tupamaros was the Weather Underground, a radical faction of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), which decided to “bring the war home” and attack symbols and institutions of what they deemed “Amerikan injustice.” The group’s statement explaining their first bombing in 1970, penned by leader Bernadine Dohrn clearly reveals their desire to link with the Tupamaros. According to Dohrn:

Revolutionary violence is the only way…We will never live peaceably under this system. [We are adopting] the classic guerrilla strategy of the Vietcong and the urban guerrilla strategy of the Tupamaros [in Uruguay] to our own situation here in the most technically advanced country in the world.

By mentioning the Tupamaros during their first bombing, the Weather Underground demonstrated the influence of the MLN-T on their revolutionary actions. Obviously versed in the Tupamaros’ practice of urban guerrilla warfare, the Weather Underground viewed the group as providing a successful model for revolution in so-called developed countries. The Weather Underground believed that the strategy of the Tupamaros offered an example of how to truly incite revolution in the US. The Weather Underground not only attempted to emulate the tactics of the Tupamaros in their urban warfare strategy of bombing government targets but also by living clandestinely in revolutionary cells.

Beyond hoping to imitate the MLN-T’s tactics, some activists in the US left portrayed the revolutionary struggle of the Tupamaros in a romanticized manner, particularly when writing about

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43 Pearsall, The Symbionese Liberation Army, 32.

44 Spelling America with a “K” reinforced the Weather Underground’s solidarity with people of color as the “K” represented a critique of America’s racist past and present. The “K” indicted American society for the Ku Klux Klan, and also conjured images of the swastika and skinheads. For both the Weather Underground and the Black Panther Party, this “K” disavowed the nation for its current policy as well as its past ills.


member and “leader” Raúl Sendic. While Debray stressed that the Tupamaros had no true leader, other admirers pointed to the specific influence of Sendic. However, these admirers also contended that even though Sendic was considered a leader by the press, in reality he had a similar role in the Tupamaro organization as his comrades. Once again, Sendic’s egalitarian role accentuated the allegedly democratic nature of the group.\(^\text{47}\)

An analysis by Robert Cohen in the California based newsletter Alternative Features Service demonstrates obvious admiration for Sendic’s reaction to his capture by the Uruguayan government in 1972. Indeed, Sendic had escaped prison before in 1971 and vowed never to let the Uruguayan government stop him or the radical actions of the Tupamaros. Cohen commended Sendic’s attempts to fight against overwhelming odds and his faithfulness to his convictions.\(^\text{48}\) These descriptions present Sendic as an unfailing inspiration to leftist revolutionaries everywhere. According to the article, admiration for the Tupamaros by US leftists should remain strong, even in times of seeming defeat. Cohen argued that support for the Tupamaros “should not be measured in the glorious moments of Tupamaros victories, but now when the MLN-T has suffered the heaviest setbacks in its history.”\(^\text{49}\) Indeed, Cohen posited that Sendic’s cry never to surrender to the Uruguayan government represented the Tupamaros’ admirable “word of honor.” In an attempt to align with the Tupamaros, sympathetic revolutionaries like Cohen often mentioned a common enemy, namely US imperialism. The strong language utilized to describe the actions of the MLN-T demonstrates the admiration some in the left held for the Tupamaros. US leftists romanticized the Tupamaros and viewed their resilience as an inspiration to all revolutionary movements to never surrender.

Other publications in solidarity with Uruguay such as the Uruguay News (based in New York City) included romantic portrayals of Sendic and depicted him as the best representative of a courageous movement against state repression. In one article, writers at the Uruguay News argued that, “Despite these conditions, it has become known that these courageous revolutionary leaders especially Raúl Sendic still keep their firm values and have expressed their willingness to be sacrificed rather than slow the course of the struggle of freedom in their country.”\(^\text{50}\) The description posits Sendic as even more


\(^{49}\) Cohen, “Tupamaros: A Movement Without a Head to Cut Off,” 2.

\(^{50}\) Uruguay Information Group, Uruguay News, no. 1 (April 1, 1979): 19. NACLA 5.
heroic than his Tupamaros counterparts, who also demonstrated admirable values in revolution such as self sacrifice. Much like the AFS bulletin, the Uruguay News focuses on Sendic as a martyr-like figure willing to give his life for the revolutionary cause. Overall, however, Sendic was still portrayed as part of a larger group of egalitarian revolutionaries who did not support rigid hierarchies.

More mainstream presses also touted the perceived successes of the Tupamaros. Throughout the 1970s, the New York Times consistently referred to the group as the “oldest and best organized urban guerrillas in Latin America;” “spectacularly successful;” “the successful pioneers of urban guerrilla warfare in South America,” and “daring urban guerrillas.”\(^{51}\) Writers of the New York Times even asserted that the capture of most of the Tupamaros by 1972 was as crushing to leftist radicals throughout the world as the fall of the Allende regime for communists.\(^{52}\)

Even non-sympathetic works that referred to revolutionaries as terrorists such as Claire Sterling’s The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism argued for the importance of the Tupamaros to left wing revolutionary groups throughout the world. Sterling considered the Tupamaros so influential that she began her book by telling the so-called history of the Tupamaros, whom she blamed for the demise of democracy in Uruguay. Sterling contends that the Tupamaros offered the initial model for planetary urban guerrilla warfare and were an “instructive case” and “pioneers in the field” of terrorism. The Tupamaros influence, according to Sterling, spanned to so-called terrorists throughout the globe.\(^{53}\) Thus, despite different representations, both the left and the right touted the Tupamaros as influential revolutionaries.

Beyond its representation in US newspapers, the US government also considered the Tupamaros a dangerous and significant force. Indeed, the Tupamaros repeatedly challenged the hegemony of the United States and the Uruguayan government. Along with kidnapping and killing US Agency for International Development (AID) agent Dan Mitrione (discussed in detail below), the group bombed US business interests and burned US diplomats’ automobiles.\(^{54}\) Admirers of the Tupamaros deemed the CIA

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\(^{52}\) “South America Drifts Right and the Left Goes Along.” NYT, February 3, 1974.


\(^{54}\) Carlos Wilson, The Tupamaros: The Unmentionables (Boston: Branden Press, 1974), 31. Created in 1961, the Agency for International Development (AID) is a US federal governmental agency that focuses on development and assistance to
and FBI “children” in comparison to the radical Latin American group. US government declassified documents also demonstrate the unease of Congress and others in the government concerning the group’s level of sophistication and success with high profile kidnappings. For training purposes, the US government viewed the Tupamaros as an instructive example in order to “acquire knowledge on worldwide terrorist activities.” Therefore, studying the Tupamaros’ tactics provided an excellent model to help US sponsored and trained counterinsurgency groups learn mechanisms to fight against terrorist groups worldwide.

Notions of Technical Superiority

The allegedly technical superiority of the Tupamaros represented another reason why the group occupied a special position in the imagination of the North American left. Alongside Cuba, for the left throughout the world, the Tupamaros represented a “socialist challenge” to the western hemisphere. The urban guerrilla warfare strategies of the Tupamaros, along with the organization’s dramatic acts of rebellion (such as distributing stolen money to the poor and escaping from prison) impressed those on the left that romanticized revolution. For example, in their first official act as “Tupamaros” the organization stole a truck during Christmas and distributed food to the hungry. In this action, twenty Tupamaros, holding revolvers and knives, attacked a corporate owned truck containing chickens and turkeys for a banquet. Referring to themselves as the “junior José Artigas unit” after the hero of Uruguayan independence José Gervasio Artigas, the Tupamaros left a note that read, “Revolutionaries share in the Christmas of the poor and call upon them to form committees in each district to fight against countries throughout the world. However, critics have charged the organization with only helping to advance military and political allies rather than genuinely attempting to support humanitarian causes. See Ryan, “Turning on their Masters,” 282-284.

55 Wilson, The Tupamaros, 32.

56 Markarain, Left in Transformation, 80.

57 For more on how the US used Latin America as a training ground for later counterinsurgency missions in the Middle East and throughout the world see Greg Grandin, Empire’s Workshop: Latin America, The United States and the Rise of the New Imperialism (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

58 Wilson, The Tupamaros, 9.

59 Labrousse, The Tupamaros, 36.
rising prices.”\textsuperscript{60} From this point on, the Uruguayan leftist press promoted this “Robin Hood” image, touting the Tupamaros’ public relations abilities, sense of humor and their mechanisms of “robbing the rich to give to the poor.” Indeed, the Christmas Eve action aroused a great deal of public sympathy for the group.

With these actions, many in the Uruguayan left felt that the Tupamaros exposed the corruption of an increasingly repressive and socially unjust state. The group taunted officials as they robbed various banks and casinos. Indeed, the robbery of the San Rafael Casino in the resort town of Punta del Este represented the largest hold up in the history of Uruguay.\textsuperscript{61} Even Uruguayan authorities admitted their fear of the group’s extraordinary ability to organize.\textsuperscript{62} This trepidation, in part, derived from the notion that the Tupamaros had infiltrated the ranks of the Uruguayan government and learned details concerning the military.\textsuperscript{63}

The actions of the Tupamaros often inspired negative consequences for those they targeted, such as leading businessmen and ranking government figures. The group’s successful exposure of corruption helped fuel romantic admiration from the left. On Valentine’s Day 1969 the Tupamaros broke into the firm Financiera Monty and “expropriated” money, documents and accounting books. The group turned the stolen information over to the Uruguayan justice system in hopes that they would investigate the shady business practices of Financiera Monty. The MLN-T made their robbery known to the public through leaflets and gave photocopies of evidence of illegal activities to the Uruguayan press. Consequently, the Minister of Agriculture had to resign because of his ties with Monty.\textsuperscript{64} This action impressed many who saw the group as responsible for exposing corruption and punishing those who deserved to be humiliated.\textsuperscript{65} Along with revealing corruption at Monty, in 1970 the Tupamaros also robbed Mailhos Trust stealing 25,000 sterling pounds, gold bullion, arms and various documents. Due to

\textsuperscript{60} The MLN later denounced the “expropriation” of the food. They argued that distributing food for Christmas only gave people “bread for today and hunger for tomorrow.” The Tupamaros came to believe that the majority of the population did not benefit from the Christmas Eve action. It was useless to share food with a small number of citizens as expropriations were needed to finance the revolution. Labrousse, \textit{The Tupamaros}, 36

\textsuperscript{61} Labrousse, \textit{The Tupamaros}, 70.

\textsuperscript{62} “Robin Hood,” \textit{Marcha}, May 23, 1969, BNU.

\textsuperscript{63} “Robin Hood,” 21.

\textsuperscript{64} Later the archives of the business were intentionally burned in order to stop more damaging information from being revealed.

\textsuperscript{65} Arrarás, “Political Learning,” 148.
the Tupamaros’ uncovering of illegal gold bullion, the police arrested a Mailhos primary associate. In order to help the legal case against Mailhos, members of the MLN-T also turned in the “expropriated” records.  

The Tupamaros’ capture of Pando, a city twenty miles from Montevideo with 20,000 inhabitants, also pervaded the left’s imagination and garnered widespread admiration for the guerrillas. On October 8, 1969, the Tupamaros cut telephone wires, shut off the radio and seized government weapons in Pando. They took over the police station and tied up employees as well as attacked three banks. Fifteen hundred police officers eventually arrived in Air Force helicopters and blocked roads to and from Pando. The Tupamaros attempted to escape but most members were caught or killed in a gun battle. The precise number of Tupamaros that participated in the siege varies depending on the source. The MLN-T claimed that over one hundred participated in the take over while police reports assert only half that number. No matter what the amount, the complete occupation of a city by such a small group impressed radicals throughout the world, who saw the Tupamaros’ tactics as daring and successful. Therefore, the victory of the mission derived in large part from the propaganda that it garnered for the group. Indeed, the Tupamaros themselves contended that the seizure of Pando was primarily envisioned as a way to politicize the people.

The MLN-T’s dramatic prison breaks represented another Tupamaro tactic that especially impressed the US left. In September of 1971 the Tupamaros liberated over one hundred Tupamaro prisoners from maximum security penitentiary Punta Carretas, among them Raúl Sendic. Further adding to the mystique of the action, members of the Tupamaros helped their comrades escape by digging a forty foot tunnel from a nearby house to the prison cells. Two months before, thirty nine Tupamaro women also escaped by using a tunnel that went from their cells to the city’s sewers. Leftist

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67 Labrousse, The Tupamaros, 75.
68 Labrousse, The Tupamaros, 74-76.
69 Arrarás, “Political Learning,” 147.
publications in the US reported these incidents with great admiration. One publication even deemed the prisoners escape “One of the most spectacular prison breaks on record.”

In order to commit these daring acts, according to their admirers, the Tupamaros practiced a higher level of discipline and discretion than other leftist guerrilla movements in Latin America. In an English language version of the Cuban publication Prensa Latina, Prudencio Corres argues that one of the movement’s greatest virtues was its “strictest silence.” Thus, Corres posits that much of the organization’s success derived from the careful compartmentalization of the various cells of Tupamaros. In these groupings, similar to other guerrilla movements, members identified only by their pseudonyms and did not commonly stay in contact with other cells. However, admirers of the Tupamaros contended that if this compartmentalization did not work perfectly the Tupamaros could easily have been uncovered and defeated. Thus, the autonomous structures of each cell allowed for the movement to continue and garnered admiration from leftists throughout the world. Indeed, writers for Alternative Features Service further demonstrated their admiration for Tupamaro tactics by referring to the group as “a movement without a head to cut off.” Although other guerrilla groups used such strategies, the press presented the Tupamaros as being more successful at clandestine subversion. However, those who romanticized the achievements of underground Tupamaro cells failed to recognize the incompetence of the Uruguayan military and how this allowed for much of the successes of the group. Nevertheless, the perception of the Tupamaros’ resilience, egalitarianism and careful organization inspired those on the left who wished to emulate the group’s tactics.

This romanticism completely ignored the hierarchal realities of the group. Indeed, the MLN-T was not as egalitarian in its organizational structures as popular propaganda claimed. While US leftists focused on the superior organization of the group’s cells and columns, they usually ignored or were unaware of the hierarchal committees who handled most of the decisions of the Tupamaros. Indeed, the group contained four rigidly constructed primary units: the cells, the columns, the Executive Committee,


and the National Convention. The Executive Committee appointed each cell a leader and an alternative leader (usually men). The cell remained in contact with the Executive Committee, usually through the appointed cell leader. The cells, which loosely banded together to make columns, also had a leader linked to the Executive Committee. The Tupamaro Executive Committee held numerous responsibilities such as approving or rejecting new members after examining a candidate’s data. Beyond admitting new members, the Executive Committee disciplined those who went against the group’s policies and ultimately handed down approval of military actions. Members of the Executive Committee could only be replaced by the National Convention (their superiors) or if the Committee decided to vote anonymously to replace a member. The National Convention held the highest authority within the Tupamaros and had the power to appoint members of the Executive Committee, change the organization’s rules and if they chose, disband the group.

Thus, the MLN-T was nowhere near as non-hierarchal as popular propaganda claimed. The structure of the Tupamaros relied on masculine ideals of discipline, authority and hierarchy, similar to the much maligned Uruguayan dictatorship. In defense of their structure, the Tupamaros argued that they had no time to employ completely democratic tactics while the government worked relentlessly to destroy them. Although the group had no single leader, the leaders of the Executive Committee and the National Convention ultimately made the decisions about the actions of the MLN-T. They communicated these decisions downward to the cells and columns, to places where the majority of the members of the Tupamaros worked for revolution. Therefore, as they clung to masculine centralized authority, the romantic representations of the egalitarian and democratic construction of the Tupamaros overall proved to be false. While the group abandoned the centralized nature of the cells and the Executive Committee and changed to more autonomous columns by 1967, the authoritarian composition of the MLN-T never significantly transformed.

76 Arrarás, “Armed Struggle,” 91.
Furthermore, while other guerrilla groups kidnapped and/or killed foreign officials, the media and leftist groups saw the Tupamaros as better disciplined, organized and able to capture more prominent targets.\(^{83}\) While some Latin American guerrilla groups often kidnapped and released their victims they, unlike the Tupamaros, were promptly tracked down by officials. Mexican guerrillas abducted the honorary British consul in Guadalajara but freed him after five days because the Mexican government did not meet their demands to either pay a $300,000 ransom or set free fifty one prisoners.\(^{84}\) Radicals typically freed most kidnapped foreigners after payment such as John Thompson, head of Argentine operations for the Firestone Company (three million dollars was paid for his release).\(^{85}\) It was the Tupamaros, however, who held important international officials for long periods of time (such as British ambassador Geoffrey Jackson for 245 days).\(^{86}\) Due in part to government incompetence and careful organization of cells, the Tupamaros kept Jackson and others in underground hideouts with little fear of police uncovering them.\(^{87}\) Indeed, the Tupamaros captured Jackson just blocks from the British Embassy in Montevideo. Tupamaro members kept Jackson and other kidnapping victims in what they called the “people’s jail.”\(^{88}\) The group argued that the bourgeoisie used jails and so-called justice against the poor in order to destroy them. In contrast, the people’s jail enforced justice for all civilians and represented a form of parallel power. Holding “people’s trials” reflected the influence of the inheritance of Uruguayan democracy on the Tupamaros.\(^{89}\)

\(^{83}\) In 1968, Guatemalan radicals killed US ambassador John Gordon Mein on the street and later in the year radicals killed military officials from the US.

\(^{84}\) “Most Foreigners are Undaunted by Latin Violence,” NYT, December 2, 1973.

\(^{85}\) “Most Foreigners are Undaunted,” 24.

\(^{86}\) Theorist Abraham Guillén criticized some of the Tupamaros’ decisions pertaining to how they executed their mission of urban guerrilla warfare. He argued that the Tupamaros’ “people’s prison” did not truly benefit the cause of national liberation but instead created a small state instead of a revolutionary army. Furthermore, Guillén opposed the Tupamaros’ detainment of prisoners for such a long period of time. Like others who agreed with the tactical excellence of the Tupamaros, Guillén argued that the kidnappings of US government agent Dan Mitrione and Brazilian consul Dias Gomide were overall successful. However, when the Tupamaros chose to execute Mitrione they did not accomplish their political goals and ended up looking like assassins in the media. The Tupamaros later admitted their error in killing Mitrione. Sendic himself claimed that the Tupamaros did not plan to kill Mitrione but a communication breakdown occurred after the Uruguayan police captured the groups’ leaders. See Shirley Christian, “Uruguayan Clears Up ‘State of Siege’ Killing,” NYT, June 21, 1987.


The group’s most famous kidnapping was AID agent Dan Mitrione, whom the Tupamaros killed after the Uruguayan government did not meet their demands for the release of 150 imprisoned Tupamaros. Radical leftists throughout the world viewed the killing of Mitrione as a daring action on the part of the Tupamaros. In fact, European leftist Constantin Costa-Gavras was so impressed by the kidnapping of Mitrione that he dramatized the events in the controversial film State of Siege (1972). Indeed, State of Siege represents another way in which the Tupamaros pervaded the imagination and activism of leftists in the US.

State of Siege

State of Siege dramatizes the kidnapping of Mitrione (renamed Philip Michael Santore in the film) and his subsequent execution by the Tupamaros. In order to educate the audience about the Tupamaros’ goals, the film features several conversations between Tupamaros and Mitrione. Costa-Gavras interrupts these conversations with scenes of government violence against leftists in Uruguay, the legislative body denouncing the actions of the state and Uruguayan reporters questioning the government as to the true identity of Mitrione. In the dialogue scenes, the Tupamaros debate Mitrione about his ideology and actions. When asked about the police force in the United States, Mitrione’s character posits that the police are “real men” to which the Tupamaros retort that they do not believe in “real men” only human beings. Thus, the film presents the ideals of the Tupamaros as life affirming and humane in direct contrast with the life denying actions of Mitrione and his kind. The film also represents the Tupamaros as an egalitarian group that make decisions through democratic means such as voting. In the dramatized version of the Tupamaros’ decision to execute Mitrione, the film shows two women voting not to kill the captive and three men affirming their approval of his death. While the gendered vote is somewhat problematic, State of Siege portrays the decision to kill Mitrione as a painstaking one and not something decided at the spur of the moment.

Though the film spends little time developing individual Tupamaro characters, the revolutionaries all appear to be young and fairly attractive. As one reporter for the New York Times wrote, “The Tupamaros we see [in the film] are mostly young, handsome, intensely sincere intellectuals who would like to avoid violence, while the establishment people are either elderly and overfed American puppets or career fanatics.”

Though Costa-Gavras denied any political posturing, State of Siege

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Siege undeniably presents the Tupamaros as the civilized and humane characters. In the film the Tupamaros go to great lengths to make sure that Mitrione receives an X-ray after he is accidentally shot during the kidnapping. In contrast, the Uruguayan government is shown shooting students and labor union members with machine guns. The film also presents graphic scenes of torture in Brazil such as the shocking of genitals and nipples in front of a group of soldiers and government officials (such as Mitrione). Indeed, the film argues that before he arrived in Uruguay, Mitrione helped the Brazilian dictatorship hone their torture skills. According to the film, Mitrione, sponsored by the US government, took part in such horrific acts as teaching torture throughout Latin America. Thus, State of Siege demonstrates for the audience why his kidnapping was a viable reaction to a US supported violent and repressive dictatorship.

State of Siege drummed up so much controversy in the US that the American Film Institute’s (AFI) inaugural festival at Washington’s Kennedy Center withdrew the film from its lineup. The AFI’s director George Stevens argued that showing the film at a memorial to JFK would have been in bad taste. He contended that the film “rationalized the act of political assassination.” In turn, the co-producer of State of Siege fired back that the AFI censored the film because Stevens had received funds from the Nixon Administration. Protestors pointed out that Stevens planned to entertain Nixon in Los Angeles during the week State of Siege was to be released. In solidarity with State of Siege, eight other films withdrew from the festival. Despite the withdrawal of the film from the festival, the AFI’s actions and subsequent accusations of censorship made the film even more popular, particularly with leftist audiences interested in issues concerning US foreign policy.

94. “Kennedy Center Drops Disputed Film,” 33.
95. “Kennedy Center Drops Disputed Film,” 33.
Two weeks later the film opened in New York to largely positive reviews. The film elicited different reactions in viewers; many reported feeling outraged by the corruption, lies and violence supported by the US government. Reporters for the New York Times as well as everyday citizens became embroiled in the debate concerning the validity of the film’s portrayal of the Tupamaros and Mitrione. Reporter Vincent Canby argued that the film overlapped journalism and fiction, but ultimately showed the “moral and intellectual” poverty of the world. Canby, like most of the left, appreciated the questions that the film raised.

A former ambassador to Peru under President Kennedy, James Loeb, became so enraged by Canby’s review that he wrote a letter to the paper in protest against the film. He condemned Canby’s and all of the left’s supposed “double standards” concerning political morality. Loeb asserted that State of Siege ultimately ignored the facts (much like McCarthyism) and that elitist leftist intellectuals justified the violence of the Tupamaros while condemning the actions of the United States. Loeb’s letter articulates an issue in the US left that State of Siege and the actions of the Tupamaros brought to the forefront—the “acceptable” uses of violence as a means of political change.

Another debate about the presentation of US foreign policy in State of Siege occurred after former counsel to President Kennedy, Theodore Sorenson, contended that although the film demonstrated more than mere propaganda, Mitrione was not as simplistically evil as the film portrayed. Sorensen criticized the film for presenting Mitrione as a “cruel or greedy right winger who knowingly abetted the suppression of human values.” Sorenson also feared that the film’s romantic portrayal of the Tupamaros would encourage US youth to engage in violent acts in order to incite political change. In response to Sorenson’s article, Jose Yglesias, a writer on Latin American affairs, criticized Sorenson for liking the film but hating what it said about AID policies in South America. Yglesias, like other leftists, argued that the facts concerning the negative actions of AID and other US government agencies were “irrefutable.” He objected to the notion by the mainstream US press that the Tupamaros committed cold blooded murder. According to Yglesias, only guilty Americans put themselves in Mitrione’s

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97 “‘Siege’: An Angry Muckraker,” 1.


99 “McCarthyism from the Left?” 155.

100 “State of Siege Speaks a Warning to Us All,” NYT, June 24, 1973.

position in the film, which accounted for the outraged reactions. Yglesias argued, “I suppose we can’t bear to be told that we’re imperialists.”102 Thus, while officials who participated in the former Kennedy administration took personal offense to State of Siege, others in the left such as Yglesias saw the film as an opportunity to teach US citizens about their government’s role in Latin America and expose them to the politics of the Tupamaros. Yglesias’ letter, of course, inspired reaction from others who did not completely accept the Robin Hood image of the Tupamaros. One letter to the editor of the New York Times stressed that Uruguay was a democracy and that the Tupamaros’ “kangaroo courts” failed to represent fair judicial processes.103 Therefore, State of Siege inspired a great deal of debate between those who saw the film as a teaching tool and those who took personal offense to its portrayal of the US government and its agents.

Sorenson’s claim that State of Siege inspired violent radical activism in the US contained some truth. Indeed, the movie did influence US leftists, in particular those in the Symbionese Liberation Army. One of the founders of the SLA, Russ Little, professed his admiration of the Tupamaros and especially the film State of Siege as inspiring him and others to start a violent organization. Little said that he and others felt that the portrayal of the Tupamaros in the film showed that, “Those guys got it figured out.”104 Beyond their political message, films such as State of Siege brought together members of the SLA for their initial meetings. The politics involved in the film offered an example which the SLA hoped to emulate. Indeed, SLA members admitted that the kidnapping of Patty Hearst was first envisioned as a prisoner swap as had occurred with Dan Mitrione and the Tupamaros in State of Siege. After realizing that they would not get a prisoner exchange, the SLA moved on to attempting to force the Hearst family to feed the poor (also inspired by the Tupamaros).105

The controversy and influence surrounding the film escalated so much that even the US government got involved in the debate. Charging the film with defaming Dan Mitrione, a State Department spokesman strongly claimed that no State Department official had taken part in torture or police brutality.106 Thus, the film’s message proved so powerful that even the US government felt the

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need to comment on its alleged falsehoods. So what was Dan Mitrione’s real role in the Uruguayan dictatorship? Was he as involved in practices of torture as the Tupamaros claimed? While the Uruguayan government argued that the murdering of Mitrione only confirmed the “loathsome crimes” and the “homicidal cold bloodedness and absence of any trace of human feeling” of the Tupamaros, others argued that Mitrione had a large part in teaching torture techniques to Uruguayan officials. Indeed, new data suggests that US advisors, including Mitrione, coordinated and even instructed Uruguayan security forces about torture techniques. While some of the sources seem dubious, declassified documents corroborate many of the claims. Former CIA agent Philip Agee and Manuel Hevia Cosculluela (who also worked for the CIA but was a Cuban double agent) have claimed that Dan Mitrione’s mission in Uruguay consisted of training police in better, so-called scientific ways to torture people. While these sources may incite some skepticism, others such as New York Times reporter A.J. Langguth have also supported the aforementioned accounts. One example of Mitrione’s role involves the agent providing the Uruguayan government electric needles of differing thickness to replace the allegedly rudimentary torture needles obtained from Argentina. Corroborating this claim, a 1970 report on human rights abuses in Uruguay denounced the treatment of prisoners and the “use of electric needles” during interrogation. Therefore, the film’s portrayal of Mitrione as an agent who taught more sophisticated torture techniques to Uruguayan officials was most likely accurate.

107 OAS, Report on the Situation, 60.


111 The US government viewed Uruguay as a country of such strategic importance that in the three years leading up to the coup in 1973 it gave 9.5% of the total Latin American military budget to the country. In 1970, Uruguay received the second highest military assistance in the entire hemisphere. Most of the funding for Uruguay came through the US Agency for International Development (AID). Indeed, the US government sponsored thousands of Uruguayan police officers in 276 courses at US facilities, most of which were offered by the International Police Academy (IPA) and the International Police Service School, both in Washington D.C. These schools, which also had links to the CIA, helped to train Uruguayans in counterinsurgency methods and ideologies in order to destroy the left. Training sponsored by the US was ultimately successful; by the early 1970s IPA graduates occupied the majority of the top posts in Montevideo’s police department and 931 officers had received in country training by US advisors. This extensive training from the US supported the implementation of purposeful and methodical torture, which human rights organizations throughout the world denounced. See Ryan, Turning on their Masters, 282 and Wolfgang Heinz and Hugo Fruhling, Determinants of Gross Human Rights: Violations by State and State-sponsored Actors in Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, and Argentina, 1960-1990, International Studies in Human Rights, 59 (Cambridge, MA: M. Nijhoff, 1999), 316-319.
Despite the controversy about the validity of the film’s portrayal of US and Latin American relations, State of Siege helped bring a message about the invasive nature of US policy in Latin America to an audience that otherwise may not have been familiar with international politics, particularly in relation to a small country like Uruguay. In an interview with New York Times reporter Judy Klemesrud Costa-Gavras asserted that he chose Uruguay and the Tupamaros in part because of his interest in more powerful governments’ (such as the US) attempts to repress and control smaller states. Therefore, for Costa-Gavras, the Tupamaros represented a successful liberation movement that emerged in large part because of the harmful and uneven relationship between the US and Uruguay. Through State of Siege, audiences learned about the politics of the Tupamaros in an overall positive manner. Costa-Gavras specifically picked the Tupamaros to represent the violent reactions of a left wing group against an increasingly repressive government. Indeed, the dramatization of the kidnapping of Mitrione reinforced leftists’ romantic notions about the Tupamaros and introduced others to the actions and ideas of the group.

**Critiques of the Tupamaros: Ideology**

Not all leftist organizations in the US and elsewhere completely supported the Tupamaros, however. While few leftists dared to challenge the Tupamaros’ military efficacy, some Marxists, particularly of the Moscow line and some Maoist groups disliked the group’s supposed lack of ideological content. Those who critiqued the Tupamaros, however, appeared to be in the minority. Indeed, while some pro-Soviet leftists existed at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, most young radicals did not view the USSR as an appropriate socialist model. The Cultural Revolution in China, on the other hand, appeared to some as a more creative kind of socialism. Officially, the Cultural Revolution advocated the participation of everyday people and their criticism of those in power,

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114 Part of this may have derived from the bombardment of anti-Soviet propaganda those in the US constantly viewed growing up during the 1950s. Furthermore, the Soviet Union’s invasion of Czechoslovakia also caused many young leftists to see the repressive nature of the Soviet Union and its similarities with the much maligned US. See Elbaum, Revolution in the Air, 48.
even those in positions of authority in the Communist Party. Furthermore, advocates of the Cultural Revolution purported to create change through ideological and not economic development.\(^{115}\) This explains, in part, why some Maoist groups expressed doubt over the ideological validity of the Tupamaros.

Pro-Maoist and pro-Moscow critics of the Tupamaros contended that after analysis the group’s philosophy revealed its imprecise and ambiguous nature. The alleged lack of Tupamaro ideology caused some in the left to argue that the Tupamaro’s direct action alone could not win over the masses or create a real revolution. The Partido Comunista Uruguayo (PCU) echoed a sentiment similar to that of pro-Moscow and pro-Maoist groups in North America. According to the PCU, the politics of the Tupamaros represented mere vanity and not true revolutionary actions that encouraged the inclusion of the people. They argued, “[Direct action] proposes to substitute action and the experience of the masses for the heroics of one group.”\(^{116}\) Some Uruguayan communists even deemed the Tupamaros’ a “childish group,” a Leninist term for radicalized middle-class young people.\(^{117}\) One pro-Chinese group in a pamphlet entitled “Tupamaros: Conspiracy or Revolution?” also contended that the middle class Tupamaros remained isolated from the masses.\(^{118}\) Indeed, while the majority of the Tupamaros came from middle class backgrounds, pro-Tupamaros activists counter argued that the group successfully raised the consciousness of urban and rural workers. For evidence, they pointed to the frequently reported acts of solidarity from the working class with the Tupamaros such as the political rallies and strikes that featured workers holding pro-Tupamaros signs. In her 1970 work La Guerrilla Tupamara, María Esther Gilio interviewed a wide range of Uruguayans to better understand citizens’ ideas about the Tupamaros. Gilio’s interviews demonstrate the general support of the working class for the Tupamaros (though there were exceptions) and widespread disillusionment with the government.\(^{119}\) Many in the public had positive responses concerning the Tupamaros, specifically for the group’s robbery of the San Rafael Casino and the subsequent distribution of the stolen money to casino workers.

\(^{115}\) Elbaum, Revolution in the Air, 45.

\(^{116}\) CAGLA, “Tupamaros,” 1. While many in the Uruguayan left approved of the Tupamaros’ practice of moving towards armed struggle, the PCU rejected most of the strategies of the Tupamaros. See Markarian, Left in Transformation, 35.

\(^{117}\) Markarian, Left in Transformation, 48.

\(^{118}\) CAGLA, “Tupamaros,” 4.

\(^{119}\) María Esther Gilio, La Guerrilla Tupamara (Havana: Casa de las Americas, 1970), 112-126.
In an interview with Gilio, a thirty-two-year old tractor driver said about the Tupamaros, “They don’t behave like common robbers.” Another worker contended that the Tupamaros stole only from places “where there is too much money.” Overall, most working class people believed that the Tupamaros only took money from those who “deserved it.” Like in the US, some in Uruguay even idealized the Tupamaros. One seventy-five year old man went so far as to deem the group “the first Christians.” Thus, in the late 1960s, due in part to the actions of the government, the Tupamaros’ popularity increased within their own country. Everyday Uruguayans developed a growing disgust at increasingly repressive police controls. This repression varied by class as police usually behaved cordially when searching upper and middle class homes, but often treated members of the working class with brutality. When working class suspects were absent from their homes, the police broke down doors and sometimes even stole items.

Despite garnering a level of support from the Uruguayan people, some leftist groups in North America and Uruguay accused the Tupamaros of conceptualizing merely a nationalistic and not socialist program aimed at liberating the people. The notion that the Tupamaros appeared to fight primarily against the dictatorship and not for the values of socialism emerged as one strong and pervasive criticism. For some strict Marxists, the name of the group supposedly proved their nationalist leanings. The Tupamaros derived their name from an Incan rebel Tupac Amaru who fought against Spanish colonization. Therefore, some viewed the name of the Tupamaros as a symbol of the group’s attempt to link their struggle to the liberation from Spanish and Portuguese colonizers. Critics deemed this integration as too nationalistic and not internationally Marxist in scope. Pointing to the fact that the Tupamaros represented a solely “nationalist” group because of their Independence era name proved little, especially considering that other left wing groups in South America named themselves after independence members and leaders, such as the Argentine Montoneros.

120 Gilio, La Guerrilla Tupamara, 117.
121 Gilio, La Guerrilla Tupamara, 119.
122 Gilio, La Guerrilla Tupamara, 126.
123 Labrousse, The Tupamaros, 113.
125 The Montoneros were named after those who fought against the Spanish on horseback. For more see Paul H. Lewis, Guerrillas and Generals: The Dirty War in Argentina (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002).
Supporters of the MLN-T compared the Tupamaros’ present day struggle with that of General José Gervasio Artigas as both supposedly fought for the independence of the Uruguayan people. For Uruguayans, Artigas represented the original heroic struggle for their country’s independence. Once a Spanish captain, Artigas deserted his assigned mission and led the fight for Uruguayan independence from its colonial masters. Artigas and his soldiers utilized rural guerrilla tactics and also engaged in some full on battles. One incident often remembered in modern Uruguay concerned the 16,000 people who marched 300 miles on foot under the leadership of Artigas. Understanding his important place in the Uruguayan imagination, the Tupamaros co-opted the public’s support for Artigas and used his mythology to recruit new members. Indeed, the Tupamaros and their supporters deemed those who collaborated with or supported the current government “bad Uruguayans.” This harkened back to an expression of contempt employed by Artigas for those who identified with the Spanish. In one communiqué the Tupamaros explained how they viewed themselves as inheritors of Artigas’ legacy of rebellion:

This is why we salute those who spontaneously rebel…Anyone is a Tupamaro if he does not merely make demands but disobeys the laws…They were Tupamaros, called bandits by the Spanish, who joined Artigas’ army and drove the foreigners out. Let us imitate them to drive out the corrupt men and speculators who have taken over the country.

Thus, the Tupamaros hoped that invoking Artigas would inspire “average” Uruguayans to join their organization. In other proclamations, the MLN-T asserted that many in the country realized they “were living through events which were like what had happened before our first independence.” Using the history of the 16,000 Uruguayans who marched with Artigas, the Tupamaros inspired “common people” by mentioning those “like the people on the eastern march, [who] have left their families and the comforts of home to join underground Uruguay.”

By recalling the actions of the past struggle for independence, the Tupamaros hoped to inspire Uruguayan people of all political persuasions to join their movement. In trying to convert possible supporters, the group neutralized some of its Marxist rhetoric and made the struggle of Artigas


128 Labrousse, *The Tupamaros*, 149.

synonymous with the struggle of the Tupamaros. They argued that their program expressed the Uruguayan historical tradition. Indeed, other revolutionary groups in Latin America, such as the Nicaraguan Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) and the El Salvadorian Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) even named their struggles after their country’s historical figures for liberation. Just as Artigas wanted to “use the land to feed the poorest people,” the Tupamaros strove to re-appropriate land from large estate holders (most of whom were foreign). By using such language, the MLN-T hoped to attract the “nationalist bourgeois” who had lost financial stability in the economic crisis of the 1960s. While this rhetoric had some success in recruiting members, the Tupamaros primarily attracted those with elements of left wing political orientation. Using nationalistic mythology for inspiration also drew criticism from hard line Marxists who saw the Tupamaros’ political ideology as opportunistic and not entirely devoted to the socialist project.

Beyond the rhetoric concerning Artigas, the Tupamaros focused on the fight for “liberty, independence, bread and the earth.” Sometimes mentioning the socialist state, the group focused on continuing their struggle until they achieved definitive freedom from an increasingly oppressive government. Moreover, the Tupamaros’ discourse focused on universal ideas of freedom and independence from tyranny. This rhetoric had as much in common with that of independence movements throughout the world as it did with socialist revolution. The Tupamaros also included elements of anarchist thought in their ideology. They focused on creating radical change through direct participation and followed no definitive blueprint for the future besides that of liberty and justice. In doing so, they continued a long tradition of anarchist activism in Uruguay. Indeed, beginning at the turn

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130 Labrousse, The Tupamaros, 156.

131 The FSLN was named after Augusto Cesar Sandino, who led the fight against conservative President Diaz and the intervention of the US during the 1920s and early 30s, until his death in 1934. The FMLN was named after Farabundo Martí, a important founder of the communist party who led workers and rural peasants in an uprising against the government in 1932. For more see Cynthia McClintock, Revolutionary Movements in Latin America: El Salvador's FMLN and Peru's Shining Path (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998) and Matilde Zimmermann, Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

132 Labrousse, The Tupamaros, 16.


134 “Preguntas,” 10.
of the twentieth century, anarchists dominated the urban labor movement in Uruguay. Therefore, the Tupamaros could be categorized as a socialist, anarchist or independence movement, or perhaps a combination of the three.

The ideological criterion for joining the group, especially at its inception, seemed more open than other revolutionary movements of the time. According to the rhetoric of the Tupamaros, their members did not necessarily need a hard line Marxist ideology but a willingness to give everything for an, “Uruguay without repression.” The lack of an ideological litmus test for possible members and a desire to include all that hoped to change the situation in Uruguay moved the Tupamaros away from a strict adherence to lofty socialist rhetoric or a desire to indoctrinate and create ideological clones. Instead, the Tupamaros appeared much more concerned with action and the struggle to remove the restraints of the dictatorship. By focusing on one unifying goal, the Tupamaros hoped to unite disparate political views and create a mass party. An unofficial Tupamaro document delineates the ambiguous nature of the group’s ideology:

We want the abolition of all property…absolute equality between the government and those they rule, both in sacrifice and pay. This, in short, is our program. We do not call it an “-ism.” We are a huge movement whose militants include all sorts of groups from Marxist to Catholic and we do not need an “-ism.”

For most organizations such ideological differences caused insurmountable problems. However, for members of the Tupamaros the impulse for action and change absorbed most ideological divisions. Indeed, one of the group’s most popular slogans was “Words divide us.”

Even the aforementioned Abraham Guillén critiqued aspects of the organization’s strategy and lack of a cohesive ideology. He admitted that the MLN-T followed an ambiguous political line which

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135 Christine Ehrick, The Shield of the Weak: Feminism and the State in Uruguay, 1903-1933 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 39. For more on the Tupamaros and the influence of anarchist thought concerning sexuality and marriage see Chapter Five.


137 “Preguntas,” 10.

138 Labrousse, The Tupamaros, 123.

139 Labrousse, The Tupamaros, 145.

140 MLN-T, Los Tupamaros en accion, 24.

141 Markarian, Left in Transformation, 35.
promised “something of interest to everybody.” For example, a bulletin for the organization contained speeches from conservative nationals such as Aparicio Saravia while other Tupamaros forbade members from criticizing the pro-Moscow Communists. Ultimately, like the pro-Moscow and pro-Maoist groups in North America and Uruguay, Guillén believed that the Tupamaros’ efficient tactics had been hurt by “mediocre strategy” and “questionable politics.” He argued that the Uruguayan government had stayed strong because of the weaknesses of the Tupamaros’ revolutionary discourse. Yet, despite these issues, Guillén continued to view the Tupamaros as the greatest “academy” in the world to teach others about urban guerrilla warfare. He believed that the group undeniably taught by actions and not theories. However, Guillén hoped that the Tupamaros’ brilliance in tactics could one day be matched by sophistication in politics.

In response to these criticisms, those in the transnational left who wished to counter the attacks against the Tupamaros argued against using “outdated” Soviet Union or Chinese models. Indeed, the Tupamaros contained flexibility in both their ideology and actions which some Marxist organizations and individuals viewed as a positive aspect of the group. Supporters of the Tupamaros often pointed to the Cuban Revolution as a positive example of ideological flexibility and revolutionary action. Tupamaro supporters argued that a systematic study of Fidel Castro’s ideology during the combat phase of the Cuban Revolution also appeared less “clearly defined” under the lens of a “consistent Marxist analysis.” Therefore, these supporters contended that leftists who recognized the ground-breaking events of the Cuban Revolution should not thoughtlessly condemn the actions of the Tupamaros. While those from the Moscow line of Marxists critiqued the Tupamaros, they ignored the fact that Latin America created unique permutations of revolution for the left.

In his work Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left After the Cold War Jorge Castañeda argues that revolutionary groups such as the Tupamaros and others in the Latin American left contain a unique character. He posits that the left in Latin America was and remains varied and achieved

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142 Guillén, Philosophy, 272.
143 Guillén, Philosophy, 272.
144 Guillén, Philosophy, 274.
145 Guillén, Philosophy, 276.
relevance beyond the rigidity of former Soviet countries. As well as hard-line Marxists, Latin America contained a large movement of the national-populist sector of the left which had staying power. Furthermore, the Cuban Revolution (particularly at its inception) represented a different kind of revolution, which built on the long revolutionary tradition of Latin America, including Emiliano Zapata in Mexico, José Martí in Cuba itself, Augusto César Sandino in Nicaragua and many others.\footnote{Castañeda, \textit{Utopia Unarmed}, 69.} Castañeda points out that the majority of revolutionaries in Latin America did not fit into the Marxist conceptualization of revolutionary leaders. Indeed, the majority of revolutionaries in guerrilla movements like the Tupamaros were educated, intellectual and middle class.\footnote{Castañeda, \textit{Utopia Unarmed}, 16.} Thus, according to Castañeda, those in North America and elsewhere who criticized the lack of so-called true Marxism in the Tupamaros showed little understanding of the distinctive nature of revolution and revolutionary groups in Latin America.\footnote{Castañeda, \textit{Utopia Unarmed}, 69.}

Indeed, the Tupamaros seemingly flaunted their ideological ambiguity and flexibility. At different times the group referred to themselves as both Marxists and socialists. Though vague, in their plans the Tupamaros called for the nationalization of banking and exportation as well as land reform by state appropriation of larger land holdings.\footnote{Weinstein, \textit{Uruguay}, 122.} They applauded the Cuban Revolution and its rejection of the infusion of foreign capital into the country. However, the overall lack of a specific theoretical base seems understandable considering that the Tupamaros derived from thirty-five different parties of the Uruguayan left.\footnote{Weinstein, \textit{Uruguay}, 2.} Their group also contained Christians, atheists, agnostics, Trotskyites, anarchists and those from traditional parties in Uruguay.\footnote{Silvia Soler, \textit{La Leyenda de Yessie Macchi} (Montevideo: Editorial Fin de Siglo, 2001), 81.} The absence of sectarianism allowed for a different type of unity than that which commonly divided the left. However, this flexibility also left the organization open to criticism from hard-line Marxists who argued for straight forward, cohesive definitions and ideology.

In reflection, members of the Tupamaros claimed that the Tupamaros represented “human life and happiness” and a “feeling instead of a political line.”\footnote{Tupamaros DVD directed by Heidi Specogna and Rainer Hoffman (New York: First Run/Icarus Films, 1996).} The Tupamaros themselves argued that they
came from a mosaic of ideologies but were united by the need to create an apparatus for armed struggle which should subsume all other political efforts. However, the group also demonstrated their awareness of outside criticisms, particularly after their defeat by the government by 1972. In 1973, as part of the self critique involved in their regrouping, the MLN-T analyzed their lack of a defined ideology. In response to the lack of a unifying ideology, which they viewed as an integral part of their defeat, the Tupamaros suggested that they should better train members in Marxist theory and the “moral values of the workers.”

Other ex-Tupamaros reflectively admitted that the organization’s “clear lack of strategy” decided the outcome of the conflict between the Tupamaros and the Uruguayan government. Some Tupamaro members have argued that many who joined the organization were in a post-adolescence period or a late adolescence phase of life which also influenced the lack of a cohesive ideology within the organization. Youthful idealism substituted for a lack of revolutionary theory and the notion of the mythical revolutionary replaced the theoretical education of militants.

Some in the North American and Uruguayan left, particularly from the pro-Maoist and pro-Moscow line criticized the Tupamaros’ lack of a cohesive Marxist ideology and supposed inability to reach the masses. They pointed to the Tupamaros’ nationalist rhetoric as strong evidence that the group failed to commit wholly to Marxist revolution. The Tupamaros undeniably employed a nationalist rhetoric, particularly by invoking Artigas in order to recruit the masses, but they also moved away from rigid definitions of who could be a revolutionary and attempted to include activists from a variety of backgrounds. This ideological flexibility reflected a common trend in twentieth-century revolutions throughout Latin America. However, the idea that the Tupamaros lacked a comprehensive ideological base was not the only critique from members of the left. Pacifist leftists viewed the Tupamaros’ practice of violence as an ineffective mechanism to inspire true revolutionary change.

**Critiques of the Tupamaros: Violence**

Additional criticisms from the left concerning the Tupamaros included a disavowal of the group’s use of violence as a means for revolutionary change. The group Socialist International, which

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156 *Tupamaros*, 1996.

called for leftist reform through electoral means, denounced both the undemocratic military regimes of Latin America, the political and economic interference of the US in the region as well as the violent tactics of the Tupamaros. The group, found throughout the US and Europe, supported political parties in Latin America which worked to create, “freedom, social justice and independence” but not those who chose violence as a way to fight for change.158

Specifically concerning Uruguay, Socialist International blamed the Uruguayan government for its structural problems and the monopolization of land by what they deemed greedy estate owners. However, they also critiqued the Tupamaros who supposedly “put fuel on the fire” of their country’s increasing political intolerance.159 The actions of the Tupamaros, claimed Socialist International, proved contrary to Uruguay’s democratic traditions. The criticisms of the Tupamaros derived in part from a larger critique of the “terrorist” left by the Socialist International. The group asserted that the root of violent tactics by the left derived from a reactionary political philosophy. These terrorist actions had nothing in common with true socialism, but rather helped to create new inspiration for repression. Socialist International viewed violent political groups such as the Tupamaros as elitist and unconcerned with the majority. Similar to critiques from the pro-violence left, the Socialist International portrayed the Tupamaro as predominately middle class and unable to ally with the working class and labor movements.160

Not all activist groups that disavowed violence agreed with Socialist International’s assessment of the Tupamaros. During the mid-1960s, for some in the pacifist left, the Tupamaros’ “Robin Hood” tactics had method to their perceived madness. Some in the left-leaning pacifist religious community such as activist Eugene Stockwell admitted that the group was “wildly imaginative” and “tightly disciplined.”161 However, by 1971 after the kidnapping and killing of Dan Mitrione and other violent actions, left-leaning religious pacifists criticized the Tupamaros’ intensification of violent tactics. These groups argued that the Tupamaros had begun to unleash on the Uruguayan people a “campaign of


161 Stockwell, “Uruguay,” 211.
Arguing along similar lines as the Uruguayan government, some North American activists claimed that the actions of the Tupamaros only incited violence from the state and right wing groups. Indeed, in 1972 para-police groups such as the Juventud Uruguaya Pie detonated bombs throughout Montevideo, killed presumed communists and shot at students at the Universidad de la República. The pacifist left condemned these “rightist thugs” as fervently as they did the Tupamaros. They argued that “[f]orce was opposed to force, military might to subversion.”

Thus, to those who opposed violence, participants as well as perpetrators were considered guilty. The criticism of the tactics of the Tupamaros anticipated feminist activist Audre Lorde’s later statement concerning how to truly change society, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”

It is important to note that while the Tupamaros asserted the need for violence, they claimed to do so only at the “correct” time and against the “correct” target. The group primarily utilized violence in self-defense or to protect third parties. There were exceptions to this claim, however, most notably when members killed rural worker Pascasio Ramón Báez with an injection of Pentothal in order to protect themselves from being discovered by authorities. In the majority of cases, however, the group directed its violent actions towards government officials and not Uruguayan civilians. The Tupamaros claimed that the “very fact of being armed, prepared, equipped, the process of violating bourgeois legality, generates revolutionary awareness, organization and conditions.” Therefore, the Tupamaros believed that knowledge of self-defense and readiness for armed confrontation enabled the possibility of true revolutionary change.

After years of their violent actions failing to change the dictatorship’s policies, the Tupamaros eventually modified their philosophies concerning the political expediency of violence and considered electoral solutions. In anticipation of the November 1971 elections, seventeen political groups created a coalition named the Frente Amplio or Broad Front. Dominant groups in the Frente Amplio included

162 Stockwell, “Uruguay,” 212.

163 Stockwell, “Uruguay,” 212.

164 Stockwell, “Uruguay,” 212.


166 Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 44.


168 Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 55.
Communists, Socialists and the Christian Democrats. The Tupamaros maintained their tactical differences with the Frente Amplio but endorsed the party for the election of 1971 and eventually joined its ranks. The Tupamaros believed that the Frente Amplio offered one avenue for the mobilization of workers. In supporting the elections the Tupamaros also argued that the work of the Frente Amplio should not “begin nor end with the elections.” However, the group saw the Frente Amplio and traditional political solutions as the most expedient way to end the dictatorship and the repression of the Uruguayan people. Thus, the Tupamaros continued to prove their ideological flexibility by transforming from a group concerned with violent revolutionary practices to supporting a public discourse on human rights and electoral solutions. This, of course, proved to be more politically expedient as the change to a language of human rights also helped to support “concrete goals” of the movement and the eventual triumph of the Frente Amplio, which later integrated former Tupamaros into its party.

During the 1960s and 70s, the Tupamaro guerrillas garnered the attention of leftists throughout the world, many of whom imagined the group in an overtly romanticized manner. These admirers perceived the Tupamaros as a fundamentally egalitarian group that performed more successful actions than other Latin American revolutionary movements. Supporters of the Tupamaros argued that unlike most other direct action groups, the MLN-T had outwitted the state and also won the support of the people. However, most on the left failed to recognize that the incompetence of the Uruguayan state allowed for a majority of the Tupamaros’ successes.

Admirers perceived the Tupamaros as consistently successful practitioners of urban guerrilla warfare. Abraham Guillén, the so-called theoretical brain of the Tupamaros, helped to articulate the group’s revolutionary development through his descriptions of the practice and theory of urban guerrilla warfare, specifically as it applied to the MLN-T. Supporters also applauded the Tupamaros’ allegedly advanced organizational skills, all of which were common in other guerrilla groups but viewed as

exemplary in the case of the Tupamaros. Beyond the idea of their perceived successes in organization and urban guerrilla warfare tactics, the film State of Siege offers another example of how the Tupamaros pervaded the imagination of the international left. Indeed, through its positive portrayal of the Tupamaros, State of Siege hoped to justify the group’s violent actions.

Despite a great deal of romanticism from the left, some pro-Maoist and pro-Moscow groups critiqued the lack of ideological coherence within the Tupamaros. Indeed, the Tupamaros focused a great deal of their propaganda on nationalist rhetoric and allowed for various political affiliations to join their group. They did not support hard line Marxist ideology but allowed for a degree of flexibility in their activism, as has been a characteristic of leftist movements in Latin America. Other North American activists, who expressed pacifist beliefs, criticized the Tupamaros for its advocacy of violence as a means of political change (which the group later rejected for political expediency). Alongside romanticism from many on the left, these debates demonstrate the degree to which the Tupamaros influenced the US left’s discourse and actions.

While some US leftists perceived the Tupamaros as successful practitioners of urban guerrilla warfare and hoped to emulate their tactics, the MLN-T and the rest of the Uruguayan left harbored their own complex opinions about politics in the US. Indeed, the Uruguayan left critiqued US foreign policy but also expressed international solidarity with militant movements in the US, specifically members of the Black Panther Party. The next chapter examines the significant influence of the US left, particularly the Black Power movement, on Uruguayan leftist ideology and strategy.
CHAPTER THREE

SUPPORTING THE “OTHER” AMERICA: WHAT LEFTIST URUGUAYANS THOUGHT ABOUT US RADICALS

“It is difficult for either Latin or North American revolutionaries to win alone…Only working together for their common liberation can they overcome the prospect of a Latin American Vietnam”-Abraham Guillén¹

Introduction

By the late 1960s, an integral part of the political strategy of the Tupamaros and the majority of the Uruguayan left involved the concept of international revolution and an alliance with radicals throughout the world.² The Tupamaros argued that direct violent action helped weaken US imperialism and also encouraged all of Latin America to move towards socialism. Due to their country’s relatively small size, the MLN-T advanced the idea that revolution in Uruguay needed to extend throughout the continent in order for it have any staying power.³ International concepts of revolution and solidarity influenced the Tupamaros as well as the greater Uruguayan left to forge ties with radical groups, even in the US, the very country whose ruling government they hoped to help destroy.⁴ Both the Tupamaros and the Uruguayan left demonstrated particular solidarity and admiration towards the Black Panther Party (BPP) and civil rights organizations in the US.⁵ They viewed the African American struggle as

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¹ Guillen, Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla, vii.
² Markarian, Left in Transformation, 35. For more on the complexities of the Uruguayan left see Eduardo Rey Tristan, La Izquierda Revolucionaria Uruguaya: 1955-1973 (Seville: University of Seville, 2005).
³ Arraras, “Political Learning,” 85.
⁴ Arraras, “Political Learning,” 85.
genuinely capable of creating revolutionary change in the US and perhaps throughout the world. Ironically, while the predominantly white middle class Uruguayan left rarely attempted to align with people of African descent in their own country, the Black Panthers offered a militant model that the movement hoped to emulate.⁶

The leading source of the international education of Uruguayan radicals came from the leftist intellectual newspaper Marcha, one of the only leftist periodicals in Latin America with subscribers throughout the continent.⁷ Published in Montevideo, Uruguay, Marcha’s articles informed readers about US politics, foreign policy and the revolutionary actions of the US left.⁸ Marcha also provided a forum to debate political issues in Uruguay such as formation of a leftist front, the Frente Amplio, for the 1971 elections.⁹ The newspaper’s extensive letters to the editor section also offer insight into issues of importance within the Uruguayan left, many of which concerned the US. Thus, the Tupamaros and the Uruguayan left received a great deal of their knowledge concerning radical happenings in the US from Marcha.¹⁰

Due in part to their knowledge of US politics, the Uruguayan left did not simplistically consider the US solely a land of oppressors and imperialists. Instead, they followed the US workers’ struggle, the actions of the white left and particularly the fight of the Black Panther Party during the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹¹ These groups came to represent the inner rebellion and disintegration of US society. For

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⁶ “Poder Negro,” Cuadernos of Marcha, no. 12 (April 1968): 1. CEDINCI. In turn, the Uruguayan left knew that US radicals especially looked to the Tupamaros for both revolutionary motivation and in order to mimic their successful tactics. Marcha featured quotes from the US left “thanking” the guerrilla fighters of Uruguay. See for example “USA no es exception,” Marcha, August 21, 1970. BNU.

⁷ Labrousse, The Tupamaros, 7.


⁹ In the 1960s, support from Marcha was integral to the founding of the Frente Amplio. Markarian, Left in Transformation, 40.

¹⁰ Araújo, Tupamaros, 211

the Uruguayan left there were two United States, one of internally oppressed peoples such as minorities and the working class and the imperialist ruling elites, who caused discord and poverty throughout the world. Looking specifically to the Black Power movement, the primarily white Uruguayan left found similarities in the repressive treatment of their respective governments. Publications such as Marcha utilized the US’s treatment of African Americans as one vehicle to critique their own country’s disintegrating democracy.

The Uruguayan left empathized with US radicals’ critique of the increasing repression of dissent in the US. Indeed, both groups had grown up with the idea that their nation possessed democratic exceptionalism. In Left in Transformation, Vania Markarian writes about the historical tradition of an “inclusive model of democracy” in Uruguay. She contends that this model, “upheld social and political equality in the name of liberal ideas of legality, freedom, rationality and progress. These ideas were manifested through a state that intervened in every sphere and established contractual relations with the citizenry.” Like in the US, for most of the twentieth century, two traditional political parties dominated Uruguayan politics without any real danger of subversion from radical forces or third parties.

While the pro-violence left of the 1960s shunned traditional politics, leftist activists also employed a discourse supporting universal ideas of freedom and justice. Indeed, within the US, radical political activism simultaneously entailed both “cooptation and dissent.” Meaning, while they criticized US institutions, leftist dissenters often supported ostensibly American ideals such as liberty and freedom. Similar ideas appeared within the discourse of Uruguayan leftists, even for the


13 By the late 1960s, the press and the left in Uruguay had little freedoms. See Gould, “Solidarity under Siege,” 354. Despite the government closure of leftist presses in the Uruguay during the late 1960s, Marcha continued to critique the repressive Uruguayan state The government closed down Marcha in 1974. Quijano began publishing the newspaper again from exile in Mexico 1977.

14 Markarian, Left in Transformation, 57.

15 Markarian, Left in Transformation, 57.

16 Markarian, Left in Transformation, 57.


18 Bercovitch, The Rites of Assent, 20.
Tupamaros who advocated violent action against the ruling state. The MLN-T employed a nationalist rhetoric that advocated universal justice and equality, ideals historically honored by the Uruguayan government.¹⁹ The parallels between the Uruguayan and US left’s conceptions of democracy and activism inspired solidarity as both groups fought for similar causes and saw themselves as persecuted victims of governments hostile towards the left. As part of this solidarity, many in the Uruguayan left aligned with the oppressed minorities of the “other” US in order to help incite worldwide revolution and the downfall of the imperialist portion of America.

**The “Other” America**

As the US left moved towards more radical conceptualizations of their country’s history by the late 1960s, some suggested that two separate nations existed within the United States. Indeed, these leftists contended that because African Americans had never truly been included as equal citizens, the US contained a dominant white supremacist nation and an oppressed black colony living within their country’s borders.²⁰ Part of understanding these two separate nations entailed looking at what leftists deemed the “imperialist history of slavery.”²¹ Radicals vociferously chose which nation they would align with, proclaiming their alliance to the so-called “black colony.” However, the US was not the only place where radicals supported this idea; sources generated by the Uruguayan left suggest that Uruguayan activists also envisioned the US as two dichotomous nations.²² Members of both the US and Uruguayan white left allied with the nation of the oppressed black colony in a common fight against US imperialism.²³ They argued that imperialist oppression was perpetrated as much inside the United States as it was through foreign relations. According to the rhetoric of the left in both Uruguay and the US, the colonized black nation shared more in common with the Third World than white US citizens.²⁴

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²² See for example “Poder Negro.”


Therefore, due to its status as a colony within the US, the black liberation movement represented a viable alternative to white America and a challenge to US imperialism.\(^{25}\)

The aforementioned Abraham Guillén echoed the idea of the US containing two separate and opposing nations. In the preface to the US translation of his work, Guillén acknowledged the importance of US revolutionaries and purported to have great confidence in “youths, students, laborers, technicians, intellectuals, women, blacks, Chicanos and Puerto Ricans in the United States.”\(^{26}\) Guillén argued that these groups constituted an internal proletariat of the US empire, which also dominated Latin America.\(^{27}\) He presented these groups as natural allies of Latin Americans, whom he deemed the external proletariat. Guillén predicted that when revolutionary forces within the US and Latin America combined, US imperialism would inevitably fall.\(^{28}\) Therefore, Guillén refused to homogenize all citizens living within the US as compliant with their government’s actions.

Instead, Guillén viewed North American revolutionaries and Latin American radicals such as the Tupamaros as dependent upon one another in the battle against US hegemony. He argued that white laborers and urban African Americans needed to reach out to Latin American revolutionaries in order to undermine US power.\(^{29}\) In turn, he contended that Latin American revolutionaries required the help of white workers and people of color within the US. This revolutionary relationship relied on combined action and solidarity against a common enemy. Due to what he viewed as an inevitable crisis because of revolutionary conditions, Guillén predicted a subsequent continental war fought by the two Americas.\(^{30}\) The culmination of this battle included a class struggle in the United States with Latin American allies supporting the revolution of the internal proletariat.\(^{31}\) Thus, Guillén advocated an alliance with the “other” US or the “internal proletariat” in order to destroy the ruling, imperialist portion of the country.

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\(^{26}\) Guillén, Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla, vi.

\(^{27}\) In *Open Veins of Latin America* Uruguayan writer and activist Eduardo Galeano also explores the notion of the “internal” and “external proletariat” in Latin America and the US.

\(^{28}\) Guillén, Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla, vi.

\(^{29}\) Guillén, Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla, vii.

\(^{30}\) Guillén, Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla, 293.

\(^{31}\) Guillén, Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla, viii.
In addition to Guillén’s support of revolutionary groups in North America, articles in *Marcha* suggested that the internal proletariat was steadily gaining power in the US.\(^{32}\) Indeed, in an article written especially for *Marcha*, sociologist James Petras presents the US government as repressive and imperialistic but also portrays the country as containing an immensely pervasive revolutionary counter culture which subverted authority.\(^{33}\) The left in Uruguay seemed to welcome social unrest and reported on the proliferation of radical movements in the US, particularly ones that advocated violence as a means of changing society.\(^{34}\) They presented groups such as the Weather Underground and the BPP as supporting the values of Marxism, idealizing Che and denouncing their country’s imperialism and dehumanization under capitalism. These groups, therefore, appeared to have a good deal in common with Uruguayans who called for radical change in their own society.

The Vietnam War also demonstrated how the US government seemed to be on the verge of collapse.\(^{35}\) Protests from the “other” US against the war demonstrated how much unrest truly existed within the country. Indeed, *Marcha* reported that by the end of 1968 the US was in a state of urban guerrilla warfare similar to Uruguay.\(^{36}\) The publication reported that in 1968 in Detroit, black militants attacked a group of police officers. Since then thousands of bombs had exploded in the US and a subculture of violent radicals had emerged. The article also listed some of the radical groups and people the US government appeared unable to locate.\(^{37}\) This included Weather woman Bernadine Dohrn, Rap Brown of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Cameron David Bishop, who hoped to sabotage the Department of Defense and some of the students involved in the bombing at the University of Wisconsin.\(^{38}\) Indeed, *Marcha* presented the US government as progressively losing the battle against the people of the “other” America.

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36 “Angela Davis y la Guerilla Urbana en Estados Unidos,” *Marcha*, Second Section, November 20, 1970. BNU.

37 For their leftist supporters in Uruguay, the fact that six people on the FBI’s Most Wanted list came from militant revolutionary groups showed the might and pervasiveness of subversive groups in the US.

38 “Angela Davis y la Guerilla Urbana en Estados Unidos,” 4.
When analyzing the full acquittal of Black Power leader Angela Davis in 1972, Marcha painted a picture of a rapidly changing US society and failing economy.\(^3^9\) For leftists in Uruguay, the freeing of Davis indicated the advancement of the revolutionary cause within North America and represented a triumph for the people of the “other” US. Leftists contended that Davis’ campaign for freedom and subsequent release showed the possibilities of transnational campaigns and international solidarity.\(^4^0\) Davis’ acquittal further reinforced the idea of a crumbling US political system due in large part to vast internal problems with African Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, the student movement and other radical elements.\(^4^1\) According to Marcha, these internal struggles helped the destruction of imperialism from within and in turn moved the world closer to global socialism.

In direct contrast to the “other” US that Uruguayan leftists supported, they vehemently criticized the actions of political leaders from the so-called imperialist portion of the US. The Uruguayan left contended that this repressive contingent of the US harmed people of color and the working class inside of the US as well as hoped to enforce its hegemony throughout Latin America.\(^4^2\) The most maligned representative of the oppressive ruling class within the US was New York senator and would be vice president, Nelson Rockefeller.\(^4^3\) Rockefeller became an ideal scapegoat for the Uruguayan left after he

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\(^3^9\) “La Hermana Angela,” Marcha, June 9, 1972. BNU. In the 1970s, Davis became embroiled in a campaign for prisoners’ rights and focused on the defense of Fleeta Drumgo, John Clutchette and George Jackson, also known as the Soledad Brothers. Upset that his brother was imprisoned, Jonathan Jackson brought guns into a California courtroom and with the help of three prisoners took the District Attorney, the judge and members of the jury hostage. Later some of the hostages died in a shootout with San Quentin guards. Though Davis was not in Northern California during the shooting, the guns used in the crime were registered under her name. Unwilling to acquiesce to authorities, Davis retreated underground. After her apprehension on October 13, 1970 Davis spent sixteen months in jail. Marcha included letters from Davis in solitary confinement, translated from the leftist publication the Guardian. The newspaper followed her trial until June of 1972, when the state acquitted Davis of all charges of murder, kidnapping and conspiracy. See Joy James, ed., The Angela Y. Davis Reader (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998). See also “Salvar a Angela Davis,” Marcha, November 12, 1971. BNU; “El Hombre se crea juez,” Marcha, Second Section, September 4, 1970. BNU and “Yo Vi a Angela Davis en la Prison,” Marcha, Second Section, November 19, 1971. BNU.

\(^4^0\) “La Hermana Angela,” Marcha, June 9, 1972. BNU.

\(^4^1\) “La Hermana Angela,” 21.

\(^4^2\) See for example Guillén, The Philosophy of the Urban Guerilla, vi-vii.

visited Latin America and subsequently became a fervent champion for anti-communism in the region.\textsuperscript{44} For the Uruguayan left, Rockefeller’s so-called imperial missions in Latin America made him a fitting figure to inspire Uruguayan resistance.\textsuperscript{45}

The Uruguayan left, particularly the Tupamaros, reacted violently to Rockefeller’s visits to their country. On June 20, 1969, in response to Rockefeller’s visit to Uruguay, a group of Tupamaros set fire to a General Motors plant causing US $1,000,000 in damage. The group left behind leaflets advocating the struggle of the Tupamaros.\textsuperscript{46} The next day the Tupamaros took over a radio station in Montevideo and broadcast a previously recorded message accusing Rockefeller of being an “emissary of imperialism” while critiquing current Uruguayan president Jorge Pacheco for complying with orders from the International Monetary Fund.\textsuperscript{47} Police finally silenced the broadcast by cutting off electricity to part of Montevideo. The Tupamaros also interrupted radio stations in the resort town of Punta del Este in order to read their manifestos during Rockefeller’s speech that same day.\textsuperscript{48} The MLN-T reacted with ire to Rockefeller’s visit as they believed he demonstrated the shameless intervention of the US government throughout the world. The group also viewed the US as dictating policies to the “worthless” Uruguayan government who blindly obeyed.\textsuperscript{49} Therefore, the Uruguayan left posited that both Uruguay and the US contained citizens fighting fervently for revolution, but also had corrupt governments determined to maintain their hegemony. For the Uruguayan left, the most inspiring revolutionary element within the “other America” was the Black Power movement.

The Uruguayan Left and Black Power

\textit{Marcha} focused a good deal of their articles in the late 1960s and early 1970s on the Black Power movement in the US. Information in \textit{Marcha} concerning Black Power included editorials, book

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item For more about Rockefeller involvement in other Latin American countries see Darlene Rivas, \textit{Missionary Capitalist: Nelson Rockefeller in Venezuela} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).
\item \textit{Uruguay: the Tupamaros in Action} (Meridian Liberation Publication, 1970), 56. NACL\textsuperscript{A} 4.
\item \textit{Uruguay: the Tupamaros in Action}, 57.
\item Arrarás, “Political Learning,” 147.
\item Labrousse, \textit{The Tupamaros}, 147.
\end{enumerate}
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reviews and translated works originally written in English by African American revolutionaries.\textsuperscript{50} Indeed, \textit{Marcha} featured reprints in Spanish of some of Eldridge Cleaver’s and Rap Brown’s works as well as George Jackson’s letters.\textsuperscript{51} When writing about Jackson, \textit{Marcha} presented his death as a murder by the US government.\textsuperscript{52} Uruguayan leftists also focused on the response of African American revolutionaries to their mistreatment by the US government and the movement’s acts of international solidarity.\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Marcha} reported that the Black Power movement understood that its fight coincided with the larger Third World as they fought against the same oppressor—US imperialism. The newspaper supported their contention by including quotes from Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver who argued that the struggle of African Americans needed to join with millions of other oppressed peoples.\textsuperscript{54} By including quotes about internationalism, \textit{Marcha} demonstrated for the Uruguayan left that the BPP offered solidarity with the global revolutionary cause.

\textit{Marcha} also managed to get personal interviews with some African American activists from the US including Ray Jones, the first soldier to desert during the Vietnam War.\textsuperscript{55} Jones, an African American from Michigan, sought asylum in Sweden after he deserted the armed forces as a protest against the Vietnam War and US racism.\textsuperscript{56} Blending anti-war activism with the Black Power movement, Jones became a celebrity of sorts for the international left. When \textit{Marcha} reporters asked Jones what he loved and hated, he responded that he loved African Americans, but hated white imperialism. Thus,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{50} For example, \textit{Marcha} reviewed a Spanish translation of Eldridge Cleaver’s work \textit{Soul on Ice} and deemed it the most ardent and passionate work of 1970 concerning African American activism. See Cristina Peri Rossi, “Testimonio Apasionate,” \textit{Marcha}, November 6, 1970. BNU.
  \item \textsuperscript{51} Eldridge Cleaver, “Una Nacion surgia de la brutalidad,” \textit{Marcha}, February 9, 1973. BNU; George Jackson, “Las Cartas de George Jackson,” \textit{Marcha}, Second Section, October 22, 1971. BNU and Rap Brown, “Revienta Negro Podrido, Revienta,” Second Section, \textit{Marcha}, July 3, 1970. BNU. Eldridge Cleaver served as Minister of Information for the BPP and authored the popular work \textit{Soul on Ice}. Rap Brown was Chairman of the civil rights organization Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and served as Justice Minister of the BPP. George Jackson, a convicted felon, became a communist and member of the BPP while in prison. For more see Eric Cummins, \textit{The Rise and Fall of California’s Radical Prison Movement} (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).
  \item \textsuperscript{52} “El Asesinato de George Jackson,” \textit{Marcha}, September 4, 1971. BNU. On August 21, 1971, three days before his trial Jackson was shot by a San Quentin prison guard during an alleged escape attempt. However, some claimed that a weapon was planted in Jackson’s cell while others have argued that there was no weapon at all.
  \item \textsuperscript{53} “La Respuesta de los Negros,” \textit{Marcha}, January 24, 1969. BNU.
  \item \textsuperscript{54} “La Respuesta,” 24.
  \item \textsuperscript{55} “Primer Desertor o Ultimo Patriota?” \textit{Marcha}, November 5, 1971. BNU.
  \item \textsuperscript{56} James Westheider, \textit{The Vietnam War} (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 175.
\end{itemize}
Jones reinforced to Marcha readers the notion of two diametrically opposed countries within the United States at war.\textsuperscript{57} The interviewer sympathized with Jones’ alliance to the “other” US and pondered whether Jones was a “deserter” or the ultimate “patriot.”\textsuperscript{58} Ultimate patriot seemed to be the resounding answer from the Uruguayan left. Indeed, members of the Uruguayan left linked the Vietnam War to issues of race, poverty and exploitation.\textsuperscript{59}

Further demonstrating the link between the Black Power movements in the US and the Uruguayan left, Marcha featured an article from Black Panther leader Stokely Carmichael written exclusively for the Uruguayan publication. By publishing Carmichael’s article, Uruguayan leftists showed their solidarity with international revolutionaries in a time of increasingly transnational politics. In his 1969 article “The Pitfalls of Liberalism,” Carmichael explained to his Uruguayan audience that African Americans did not incite the excessive violence and repression perpetrated upon them by the US government.\textsuperscript{60} Instead, he argued that African Americans had merely discovered ways to fight back against violent racist oppression. Moreover, Carmichael implicated not only the imperialist regime of the US for its support of rampant racism but also so-called liberals and reformists.\textsuperscript{61} Carmichael reminded readers of the absurdity of supporting non-violence considering the widespread destruction associated with the history of the colonization of the Americas and with US intervention throughout the world. Thus, Carmichael argued the US was not good, free or democratic, but rather founded on violence.\textsuperscript{62} Revolutionary violence intended to destroy an unjust system and replace it with an equitable one while counterrevolutionary violence merely supported oppression.\textsuperscript{63}

The use of violence to fight against repressive governments reinforced many of the current ideas of the Tupamaros and their sympathizers who saw the actions of the MLN-T as justified. For their

\textsuperscript{57} “Primer Desertor,” 12.

\textsuperscript{58} “Primer Desertor,” 12.

\textsuperscript{59} For example, a letter to the editor of Marcha linked the recruitment of individuals for the war in Vietnam to issues of racism. See “Reclutamiento de Uruguayos,” Marcha, November 21, 1969. BNU.

\textsuperscript{60} Stokely Carmichael, “Las Falacias del Liberalismo,” Marcha, February 28, 1969. BNU.

\textsuperscript{61} Carmichael, “Las Falacias,” 16.

\textsuperscript{62} Carmichael, “Las Falacias,” 16.

\textsuperscript{63} Carmichael, “Las Falacias,” 16.
supporters, the Tupamaros only participated in violence to fight an unfair system of power. The Tupamaros themselves rationalized their actions by claiming, like Carmichael, that elections and legality were merely facades that attempted to mask the real exploitation that existed within Uruguay’s alleged democracy. The idea of revolutionary violence versus state violence would continue to be an important topic for Uruguayans. In the proceeding years, the Uruguayan government publicly denounced the violence of those in the left (particularly the Tupamaros) while continuing to perpetuate repression against its own citizens.

Besides dozens of articles concerning the Black Power movement, the supplemental journal to Marcha, Cuadernos de Marcha devoted an entire issue to the subject of African American politics. A special edition of Cuadernos de Marcha entitled “Poder Negro” (“Black Power”) sought to trace the roots and goals of the African American civil rights movement and offer insight into a movement that fascinated Uruguayan leftists. The issue stressed the continuity of the black struggle in the United States and posited that the voice of Stokely Carmichael represented the same voice of African Americans who had rebelled against slavery in the antebellum period. While asserting the essential sameness of Carmichael and slave rebels may appear to homogenize the black struggle, in actuality “Poder Negro” accentuated the multiple types of activism within the civil rights movement. Indeed, Uruguayan leftists expressed great interest in Black Power but also acknowledged the multifaceted nature of the civil rights movement. “Poder Negro” explored subjects of non-violence versus violence and integration versus separation. The issue offered a detailed focus on the schisms between the SNCC and the more moderate followers of Martin Luther King’s mechanisms for social and political transformation.

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64 Gilio, La Guerrilla Tupamara, 112-126.
65 Markarian, Left in Transformation, 58.
66 OAS, Report on the Situation, 60.
67 “Poder Negro,” 1.
68 “Poder Negro,” 1.
69 The Black Panthers themselves claimed to derive strength from what they saw as a long history that began in Africa. See Judith Newton, From Panthers to Promise Keepers: Rethinking the Men’s Movement (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 57.
70 “Poder Negro,” 1.
The writers of “Poder Negro” also compared the struggle of blacks in the United States to those throughout the Third World. They contended that especially in the Third World, liberation could not occur solely through the unity of class. They indeed, the African American civil rights struggle helped to inform leftist Uruguayan about the complex nature of revolutionary action that prioritized identities other than class. The predominantly white Uruguayan left stressed the need for activism inspired by racial interests as well as class for those in countries on the “eve of revolution.” They focused on the need to move beyond territorial borders for a different alliance—those within and outside of the United States who wanted to bring down the ruling government of that nation. The writers of “Poder Negro” felt such an affinity for African American movements that they asserted that the civil rights movement in the United States also represented “our struggle” or the struggle of leftists in Uruguay.

Uruguayan leftists’ interpretation of US history in “Poder Negro” demonstrated that the movement conceptualized African American history through a prism of their own experiences. When describing the period of Reconstruction after the Civil War, the writers of “Poder Negro” argued that the North instituted a sort of “military dictatorship” over the South, with the help of blacks. While this may be technically true, the language utilized in the description demonstrates that the writers conceptualized something similar to the repressive forces they lived under at the time. Therefore, as they compared their struggle to the internal colony of African Americans in the US, Uruguayan leftists also translated US history in a culturally and politically understandable way to their readers.

Due to the lack of a common racial identity, the Uruguayan left focused a good deal of their attention on issues of African American labor. The writers of “Poder Negro” fervently condemned the racism of white workers in the US. They pointed out the specific discrimination against black women workers in the US and critiqued their sub-par salaries and degrading work. “Poder Negro” particularly indicted the entire white working class in the US as merely another group that participated in African

72 “Poder Negro,” 1-2.
73 “Poder Negro,” 1.
74 “Poder Negro,” 2.
75 “Poder Negro,” 17.
76 “Poder Negro,” 22.
American repression. This terrible treatment, according to the writers of “Poder Negro,” explained African Americans’ current reticence to ally with white workers.77

The condemnation of the experiences of African American workers in the US proved ironic considering the negative situation of black workers in Uruguay. Most Afro-Uruguayans occupied service sector jobs with women working overwhelmingly in domestic service. Indeed, as recently as 1988 fewer than two hundred Afro-Uruguayans had a college education.78 This exceptionally low number contrasted with the 61,000 white students enrolled in college in Uruguay in 1988.79 Therefore, the left in Uruguay critiqued the exploitation of black workers in the US, but rarely mentioned the plight of Afro-Uruguayans. Indeed, the Uruguayan left passionately denounced racism in the US and identified similarities between African Americans and Uruguayan citizens as colonized subjects of the US government. However, notions of analogous experiences between blacks in Uruguay and those in the US remained absent from the left’s discourse.80 This absence reflected what many in the Afro-Uruguayan population have argued about the invisibility of the black population in their country’s political and social discourse.81 These critics contend that ignoring the existence of racial differences in Uruguay did not result in equality but rather more subtle forms of racism.82

Therefore, the Uruguayan left easily conceptualized the struggle of those of African descent in the US but rarely acknowledged even the presence of blacks in their country. In his 2001 essay “The Afro Populations of America’s Southern Cone” Romero Jorge Rodríguez writes about the historical

77 “Poder Negro,” 22.


79 US Library of Congress, “Education.” http://countrystudies.us/uruguay/42.htm. As recently as the early 2000s, in a study performed by the Uruguayan Organizacion Mundo Afro (OMA), 89.6% of Afro-Uruguayan women worked in the service sector, with half in domestic service. Only 0.5% of Afro-Uruguayan women received higher education or worked in managerial positions. Of the educated, nearly half of those remained unemployed or occupied jobs in which they were overqualified. See Gabriela Malviásio “Black Women in Uruguay: Ethnic Differences,” Women’s Health Journal (Jan-March 2004). http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0MDX/is_1_2004/ai_n1720271?8??tag=content:col/.

80 “Poder Negro,” 1.

81 The only recorded attempt of the Afro-Uruguayan population to construct a political party solely on the basis of ethnic interests was the Partido Autóctono Negro (PAN), founded in Montevideo in 1936. PAN attempted to fight labor discrimination against Afro-Uruguayans and promote their electoral participation and representation. However, the group had no electoral success. See Rodríguez, “Afro Populations of America’s Southern Cone,” 324.

refusal of Uruguayans to admit the realities of ethnic differences in their country. He contends that “[t]wenty years ago it would have been inconceivable to admit that the Uruguayan population was composed of a rich mosaic of cultures, and that each of these cultures has evolved according to its own historical specificities.”

Indeed, only recently has any significant discourse about Afro-Uruguayan populations emerged in the country.

During the 1960s and 70s, the Uruguayan left’s lack of interest in issues of race in their own country mirrored what the rightist Uruguayan government posited about racial relations. Members of both the left and the right usually denied the existence of any racial diversity in their country, especially in comparison to other Latin American countries. In doing so, Uruguayans’ perception of their nation contrasted with those in countries such as Brazil and Cuba who have consistently argued that they support racial equality. Within Uruguay, however, the perceived invisibility of people of color failed to reflect the realities of the situation of Afro-Uruguayans. Therefore, though the Uruguayan leftist press, particularly Marcha and other publications admired the Black Power movement in the US, they overall ignored issues of race in their own country.

Members of the Uruguayan left admired the African American civil rights movements from afar but also interacted with US groups. Indeed, international issues greatly interested the Black Panther Party and they reached out to groups and movements throughout the world, including the Uruguayan left. BPP newspapers extensively covered the struggles for liberation in Africa and the Developing World. Black Panther leaders visited China (and came back with positive responses) and some party members

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83 Rodríguez, “Afro Populations of America’s Southern Cone,” 314-315.

84 One of the most well known organizations to promote Afro-Uruguayan culture and societal acceptance is Mundo Africa, founded in 1988.

85 Marcha, February 19, 1971, 11. BNU.

86 In 1975, Uruguayan dictator Juan María Bordaberry argued that there were no racial problems in his country because indigenous populations were “nonexistent” in Uruguay. See Bordaberry letter to Kenneth Golby, February 12, 1975. NACLA 5.


88 Rodríguez, “Afro Populations of America’s Southern Cone,” 325.

89 Elbaum, Revolution in the Air, 67.
found sanctuary in Cuba.\textsuperscript{90} The Panthers remained so devoted to international solidarity that Panther leader Huey Newton offered for his group to fight in Vietnam for the communist National Liberation Front (his offer was declined).\textsuperscript{91} Thus, the BPP understood the importance of forging international connections and gaining support from leftists throughout the world.

Members of the BPP even wrote a letter to the editors of \textit{Marcha}, published in the May 9, 1969, edition of newspaper asking for both monetary support and international solidarity from Uruguayan leftists.\textsuperscript{92} The fact that the group reached out to \textit{Marcha} demonstrates the Panther’s awareness of left wing Uruguayans’ support for their cause.\textsuperscript{93} Indeed, the BPP must have had some understanding of their important role in Uruguayan leftists’ imagination and activism. In order to inspire Uruguayans to send money, the Panther’s letter informed \textit{Marcha} readers about BPP leader Eldridge Cleaver and his recent arrest. Hoping to demonstrate the significance of Cleaver, they compared the activist to Malcolm X and listed his publications and political activism.\textsuperscript{94} The BPP turned to Uruguayan leftists to ask for their help in raising fifty thousand dollars for Cleaver’s legal resources. The letter even featured the address of the BPP in Oakland, California in hopes of receiving monetary support. By asking for the support of the Uruguayan left, the Panthers connected with a group that had consistently offered solidarity and expressed interest in their cause. In addition to the frequent and usually positive representations of the Black Power movement in \textit{Marcha}, the Tupamaros also showed an interest in African American culture and politics as well as US counterculture as a whole.\textsuperscript{95}

\textbf{The Tupamaros and Black Power}


\textsuperscript{91} Elbaum, \textit{Revolution in the Air}, 67.

\textsuperscript{92} “\textit{Apoyo},” \textit{Marcha}, May 9, 1969. BNU.

\textsuperscript{93} “\textit{Apoyo},” 2.

\textsuperscript{94} “\textit{Apoyo},” 2.

The Tupamaros specifically looked to the Black Power movement for political and cultural inspiration. However, the group revealed little about their genuine political interests and theories; thus analyzing the accounts of MLN-T prisoners exposes information about the group’s relationship to US radicals. During a conversation with kidnap victim Dan Mitrione, a member of the Tupamaros asked if their captive had seen the film Zabriskie Point. The Tupamaro found the film, which encouraged US countercultural violence very “interesting.” Furthermore, just as the Weather Underground knew about the Tupamaros, the MLN-T expressed awareness of the radical US organization. In the same conversation, a Tupamaro and Mitrione discussed the great amount of social unrest within US universities, a topic in which the Tupamaros appeared well versed. As Mitrione spoke of demonstrations and hippies, an unidentified Tupamaro interrupted the captive and asked about the Weather Underground. Though the Tupamaro did not express complete romanticism about the group, he still seemed impressed by the politics of the group. He told Mitrione that the Weather Underground “Make enough noise to be listened to.” Therefore, it seems that at least some Tupamaro members knew of the Weather Underground’s tactics and believed that they performed enough violent action to garner the attention of the US government. While scholars have traditionally focused on the US left’s awareness of other movements, the Tupamaros demonstrated their knowledge of US groups that admired them. However, this relationship did not consist solely of the US left admiring and following Tupamaro tactics. MLN-T members read works written by African American radicals and scholars, particularly those in the Black Power movement. According to captive Geoffrey Jackson, some favorites of the group included James Baldwin and Rap Brown. It was fitting that the Tupamaros expressed interest in Rap Brown, as he had famously deemed violence as “American as cherry pie.”

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96 Dialogue Before Death, 16. For more on other US films that inspired the gendered worldview of the Tupamaros see Chapter Five.

97 Dialogue Before Death, 15.

98 Dialogue Before Death, 15.

99 Jackson, Surviving the Long Night, 125.

100 Elbaum, Revolution in the Air, 36. The Tupamaros likely got much of their information about the pro-violence Rap Brown from Marcha, which translated and published part of his work about Black Power. See for example Rap Brown, “Revienta Negro Podrido, Revienta,” Marcha, Second Section, July 3, 1970. BNU.
In addition to reading the works of black activists, the Tupamaros also enjoyed US protest music and musical genres dominated by African American artists.\(^{101}\) The group frequently listened to soul music, which they claimed expressed the inequality of urban life in the US.\(^{102}\) According to Jackson, his numerous Tupamaro captors also constantly played a recording of an English language group repetitively chanting “Power to the People.” The Tupamaro jailers not only understood the meaning of the words but also joined in the chanting to express solidarity with African American political movements in the US.\(^{103}\) Indeed, chanting “power to the people” was a way to inspire particular Tupamaros and helped to pass the time during their tedious job as jailers.\(^{104}\) These acts of solidarity offer an example of not only an affinity for Black Power politics but also for African American culture, specifically music and protest songs for some members of the Tupamaros. Therefore, African American culture, particularly music, became very important in the day to day lives of the clandestine Tupamaro militants who kept Jackson captive.

The Tupamaros also demonstrated their sensitivity to African American history by their reaction to Jackson’s claim that their disguises resembled hoods of the Ku Klux Klan. The Tupamaros associated the hoods with fascism and to the much maligned racist United States.\(^{105}\) Tupamaro members even willingly took suggestions from their captive as to how not to look like the KKK and ultimately changed their disguises. The readiness of Tupamaro members to alter their jailer disguises at the request of their captive showed sensitivity on the part of the group to the history of the struggles of African Americans as well as a fervent desire to reject the infamous racist organization.\(^{106}\) The Tupamaros likely learned about the KKK from the Uruguayan leftist press as they educated their readers about the history and activities of the organization.\(^{107}\) One article described the KKK’s activities such as burning crosses and

\(^{101}\) Jackson, *Surviving the Long Night*, 134.

\(^{102}\) Jackson, *Surviving the Long Night*, 134.

\(^{103}\) Jackson, *Surviving the Long Night*, 135.

\(^{104}\) Jackson, *Surviving the Long Night*, 135.


general acts of violence against African Americans. Others condemned the lynching of African Americans and what they viewed as unparalleled racial prejudice within the US. In addition to news articles, Uruguay activist and poet Idea Vlariño wrote passionately about the treatment of African Americans in the US. In the poem “Agradecimiento” she lamented, “Others…if they are born black in the United States…are killed like dogs.” Therefore, the Uruguayan left presented US society as harmful, perhaps even deadly for African Americans.

However, while the MLN-T expressed great solidarity with African Americans the group included no real programs or even rhetoric concerning race and essentially ignored issues concerning people of color within Uruguay. Ironically, though the Tupamaros rarely mentioned racial issues within Uruguay, their name derived from a figure who preached racial unity. Of indigenous heritage, Tupac Amaru’s political programs supported social justice and united Native peoples, mestizos, Spaniards and those of African descent. Despite their avoidance of racial issues concerning Afro-Uruguayans, the Tupamaros continued to be influenced by the culture and politics of the Black Power movement.

Indeed, the Tupamaros consumed aspects of African American culture and at the same time denounced US policies. This complex relationship moved beyond dichotomous notions of Latin American left wing anti-Americanism versus compliance with US policies. Historians have argued that the US’s influence in Latin America proves far too simplistic if scholars only focus on military, economic and political hegemony. The Uruguayan left’s political and cultural solidarity with the “other” United States showed a variant and complicated kind of exchange that did not replicate traditional models of dominance and acquiescence. These contradictions demonstrate the complicated nature of US and Latin American relations and prove the difficulty of homogenizing all of Latin America’s interactions with the US. Indeed, as secular, middle class and mostly descendants of Europeans, Uruguayans had a different experience with US influence and cultural dominance than most

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109 “Yo Vi a Angela Davis en la Prison,” 19.


111 Labrousse, The Tupamaros, 15.

112 Labrousse, The Tupamaros, 15.

of Latin America. Indeed, most Uruguayans saw their demographic and cultural differences from the rest of Latin America as a positive element that helped to create their exceptional nature.

Members of the Tupamaros even contended that Uruguay had more “civilized” traditions and a different history than the rest of Latin America. In a conversation with prisoner Dan Mitrione one Tupamaro contended that, “human life is cheaper [in other Latin American countries] than in Uruguay.” The Tupamaro also told Mitrione that the Tupamaros are “smarter” than other radicals because they only kill when absolutely necessary. According to the Tupamaro, other leftist groups in Latin America, “indiscriminately kill…and shoot and ask questions later.” Therefore, the conversation illustrates that some in the Tupamaros believed that the exceptional nature of Uruguay could also be seen in the MLN-T’s tactical superiority and restraint.

Proving the complex nature of the self conception of cultural and historical superiority, at times the Uruguayan left seemed to ignore their country’s predominantly white racial heritage in an attempt to align with African Americans. For example, in a Marcha article about controversial African American exhibitions at the Whitney Museum in New York City, the author aligned the Uruguayan left’s struggle with that of African Americans. They argued that black US artists confronted similar issues to any Latin American or colonized artist. The article contended that Uruguayans and other Latin Americans, like their black US counterparts, adopted the mannerisms and perceptions of the colonizers’ art. Therefore, both African Americans and Uruguayans struggled to create their own unique aesthetic, free of European control and influence.

The rarely articulated claim of common European colonization and

114 Luz, “Uruguay,” 342.
116 See for example Dialogue Before Death, 17.
117 Dialogue Before Death, 17.
118 Dialogue Before Death, 17.
119 Marcha, June 24, 1971, 23. BNU.
120 Marcha, June 24, 1971, 23.
destruction was fascinating considering that most in Uruguay ethnically represented the so-called colonizer. Thus, while the Uruguayan left usually clung to their country’s European traditions, at times they claimed they inhabited part of the “Third World” in order to ally with African Americans.122

While dozens of articles and letters in Marcha focused on African American struggles and debated issues concerning Black Power, they rarely paid attention to other minority groups in the US, even those arguably of similar descent as Uruguayans, namely Latinos.123 In one article about a Chicano protest, Marcha writers focused on the disproportionate number of young North Americans of Mexican descent sent to fight in Vietnam, but reported nothing else. While the Uruguayan left expressed sympathy with the protests of Chicano/as, it did not identity with those of similar origin and affiliation. Indeed, most of the white Uruguayan left seemed to believe that they had more in common with the African American struggle than Latinos in North America.124

Just as they decided which ethnic and cultural backgrounds would define them politically, the Uruguayan left selectively decided which elements of US culture they would embrace and which they would denounce. The Tupamaros’ enjoyment of African American music and methods of protest as they critiqued US imperialism illustrate this complex relationship. Thus, Tupamero members supported the politics and culture of the “other” US, that of African descent.

Why did the Uruguayan left express such interest in the Black Power movement in the US? There are several possible answers to the question of motivation, including the fact that like most revolutionaries throughout the world, the Uruguayan left and the BPP fought against a common enemy. However, this admiration went farther than a mere alliance against US imperialism.125 Members of the Uruguayan left glamorized the struggle of the BPP and its militancy, which in many ways mirrored the philosophies of the Tupamaros. Indeed, the Tupamaros viewed Black Power culture and politics as

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122 For example, in the black power issue of Cuadernos de Marcha the Uruguayan left aligned themselves with the Third World.


125 “Poder Negro,” 1-2.
revolutionary and appreciated its mockery of the US establishment and desire to critique “imperialist” America.\textsuperscript{126}

Another likely reason for the passionate acts of solidarity with African American civil rights was that they provided an outlet for the anger of the Uruguayan left. As the Uruguayan state became increasingly authoritarian by the late 1960s, the frustration that citizens felt for their own government could be channeled through solidarity with African Americans and the student left, who also experienced their own repression by the government.\textsuperscript{127} Indeed, the Uruguayan left likely saw parallels in their own situation when they learned of the imprisonment and persecution of African Americans.\textsuperscript{128} While genuine solidarity with African Americans occurred as part of a transnational leftist movement, Black Power and its subsequent repression by the US government offered the Uruguayan left another vehicle to vehemently denounce repressive state apparatuses. For example, in one letter to the editor of Marcha, an activist passionately decried a “racist judge” that had treated Black Power leader Bobby Seale and other African Americans unfairly. The letter criticized how the so-called grand democracy of the US no longer facilitated truly impartial trials.\textsuperscript{129} The criticism of the US’s failing democracy mirrored what the Uruguayan left privately and sometimes publicly expressed about their country. Both nations had grandiose claims about democracy, but in actuality broke promises to their citizens in the 1960 and 70s (to varying degrees). In her letter to the editor, the activist also argued for the importance of the Uruguayan people denouncing the alleged farce of justice in the United States.\textsuperscript{130} She advocated for Uruguayans to appreciate the significant struggle of the Black Panthers and to denounce their unequal treatment by the judiciary. The question of justice for the incarcerated Panthers, therefore, also mirrored a similar question within the increasingly jailed and interrogated Uruguayan left. The Tupamaros in particular could relate to the Panthers as by 1972 most of the leaders of both groups had been jailed or killed and their movements were floundering.\textsuperscript{131}

\textsuperscript{126} For more on this phenomenon within Europe see Reinhold Wagnleitner, Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).


\textsuperscript{129} “EE.UU: 16 Condenas A Un Solo Pantera Negra,” Marcha, December 5, 1969. BNU.

\textsuperscript{130} “EE.UU: 16 Condenas A Un Solo Pantera Negra,” 3.

While not to the same extent, the actions and persecution of the student left in the US also offered Uruguayans another vehicle to criticize their government’s treatment of the student left. One article in Marcha about the Kent State killings pointed out that US Vice President Spiro Agnew referred to student activists as terrorists. Therefore, like in Uruguay, pointing out the radical nature of subversives supposedly justified the unfair treatment and violent tactics of the government. The persecution of the student left in the US mirrored many of the problems within Uruguay. Despite their reputation as a beacon of democracy, the Uruguayan government also presented the student left and the Tupamaros as terrorists and responded to protests with the exertion of violence.

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Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, US radicals had an important influence on the politics and culture of the Uruguayan left. This influence was supported in large part by leftist publications, particularly the newspaper Marcha. By featuring articles concerning leftist movements in the US, Marcha helped to educate the Uruguayan left about the ideas and radical actions of US revolutionaries. The newspaper paid specific attention to the Black Power movement and translated writings by BPP militants into Spanish. Articles in Marcha also presented the US as divided into two Americas. One nation included imperialist and oppressive elites such as Nelson Rockefeller who perpetrated crimes throughout the world. The “other” US contained students, the working class and people of color who fought to destroy imperialism and in turn became natural allies of leftist Uruguayans. Due in large part to African American revolutionaries, the Uruguayan left presented the repressive part of the US as finally beginning to lose its power.

Thus, the predominantly white left in Uruguay expressed solidarity with the struggle of radicals in the US, particularly the Black Panther Party. Some in the Uruguayan left even argued that the struggle of African Americans represented the same fight as the Uruguayan people. Indeed, both supposedly struggled against the same oppressor—US imperialism. Ironically, Uruguayan leftists passionately

133 See OAS, Report on the Situation, 60.
advocated for better treatment of those of African descent in the US but ignored the marginalization of Afro-Uruguayans in their own country. The fact that the Uruguayan left focused on racial issues in the US and not in Uruguay demonstrates that they too, perhaps unwittingly, supported the invisibility of people of color in their own country. The interest in African American politics stemmed, in part, from the movement offering another outlet for Uruguayan leftists to express their anger towards an increasingly repressive Uruguayan government. The Uruguayan left found parallels in the treatment of radicals by the US government and their own government’s jailing of members of the left.

While Uruguayan leftists expressed solidarity with radicals in the US, North American activists also worked on behalf of Uruguayans, particularly after the official institution of the dictatorship in 1973. In order to protest the Uruguayan dictatorship, various types of political strategies emerged. This included letter writing and petitions initiated by human rights groups as well as leftist solidarity movements focused on fighting both the dictatorship and the capitalist system. The next chapter explores the specific types of solidarity offered to Uruguayans during the dictatorship and the gendered nature of these interactions.
CHAPTER FOUR

SOLIDARITY AND RECIPROCAL CONNECTIONS: US ACTIVISM ON BEHALF OF URUGUAY

“We must realize that borders exist only on maps”-Group for the Support of the Uruguayan Resistance (GARU).¹

Introduction

In a 1972 article about human rights violations in Uruguay, activist and missionary Eugene Stockwell lamented transnational organizations’ lack of concern for the “small” country. He pondered, “Does anybody care about the nation’s plight? Are human rights violations less precious in Uruguay than elsewhere? How far must repression go before our ‘global village’ recognizes that such a cancer, even in little Uruguay affects us all?”² Indeed, in 1972 few international activists prioritized denouncing the steady decline of democracy in Uruguay. However, after the official coup in 1973, new and disturbing information emerged about the dictatorship, inspiring a proliferation of international human rights activism concerning Uruguay.³ Amnesty International expressed particular concern for the erosion of human rights in Uruguay and by the mid to late 1970s made the country one of its primary foci. At an Amnesty International press conference held in Mexico City in 1976, members reported that Uruguay ranked number one in the world for torture.⁴ Besides Amnesty International, in 1979 alone the Human Rights Commission of the UN; the European Parliament; the OAS; the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the World Council of Churches and the International Labor Organization all denounced human rights

¹ Grupo de Apoyo a la Resistencia Uruguay (GARU), Banda Oriental, no. 4 (January 1975): 2. NACLA 1.
² Stockwell, “Uruguay,” 213.
violations in Uruguay.\textsuperscript{5} In March 1980, the Human Rights Commission of the UN listed nine countries that consistently violated human rights; Uruguay was among them.\textsuperscript{6} In turn, the Tupamaros and others in the Uruguayan left knew of the international support their jailed comrades received throughout the world and remained hopeful that international denunciations would help their cause. Indeed, in an unpublished letter about police brutality in their country, the Tupamaros attempted to upset authorities by declaring that international organizations knew of and denounced the gross human rights violations perpetuated by their government.\textsuperscript{7}

At its peak the number of political prisoners in Uruguay totaled 7,000 with nearly 2,000 Tupamaros jailed. The Uruguayan government arrested people for having Marxist ideals, belonging to trade unions or merely criticizing the government.\textsuperscript{8} Due to the dire human rights situation in Uruguay, many groups focused on condemning government repression rather than offering leftist solidarity. These groups employed statistics and anecdotes concerning torture and used a language of human rights in their activities concerning Uruguay.\textsuperscript{9} They petitioned, wrote letters and worked within every available legal channel to raise international awareness about torture and other human rights violations.\textsuperscript{10} While some groups focused on human rights violations and attempted to remain more apolitical, others openly expressed left wing sentiments while condemning Uruguay’s harsh treatment of political prisoners.\textsuperscript{11} Uruguayan exiles comprised a large part of these groups; they allied with other leftist North Americans to criticize their country’s government.\textsuperscript{12} Leftist organizations utilized various strategies in their attempts


\textsuperscript{6} The commission also condemned Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay.

\textsuperscript{7} Labrousse, The Tupamaros, 153.


\textsuperscript{9} Markarian, Left in Transformation, 2.

\textsuperscript{10} It is important to note that in the 1970s the idea of “human rights” was still considered a radical idea. See Markarian, Left in Transformation, 1.


\textsuperscript{12} For more about the experience of leftist Uruguayan exiles during the dictatorship see Markarian, Left in Transformation, esp. Chapter 3.
to offer solidarity to the Uruguayan people. Some condemned the capitalistic nature of the dictatorship as well as its ties with US “imperialism” and apartheid in South Africa.\textsuperscript{13} Indeed, denouncing the economic, diplomatic and social relationship between Uruguay and South Africa gave leftists an opportunity to denounce human rights violations in both countries as well as speak out against racism.

Within these various forms of activism, some leftists in the US forged genuine reciprocal connections with Uruguayans. These groups did not behave overtly paternalistically with their Latin American comrades and sometimes created genuine connections. However, most US groups failed to offer solidarity specifically to women prisoners or examine gendered experiences under the dictatorship. In contrast to the majority of solidarity groups concerning Uruguay, one transnational feminist organization, Women’s International Resource Exchange (WIRE), made connections with the family of an incarcerated Tupamara, Yessie Macchi.\textsuperscript{14} Indeed, Macchi and her family initiated contact with WIRE in hopes of inspiring international solidarity to help Yessie’s cause. Therefore, various types of solidarity groups emerged in the US during the 1970s and 80s with different priorities concerning Uruguay.

**Human Rights Activism**

By the mid 1970s, human rights groups in the US fervently denounced the mistreatment of Uruguayan citizens by their government. These groups varied in size and interests, but all fought against gross human rights violations in Uruguay. In the US, a handful of transnational groups presented themselves as most concerned with general human rights violations. One such group was the New York based Committee in Solidarity with the Uruguayan People (CSUP).\textsuperscript{15} The CSUP promoted the freeing of Uruguayan political prisoners and raised public awareness primarily through the publication of materials about the situation in Uruguay. They also encouraged letter writing campaigns to the Uruguayan and US government, human rights groups and media outlets.\textsuperscript{16} Therefore, the group understood the importance

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13}See for example Uruguayan Association Against Racism and Apartheid, “The Policy of Co-Operation with the South African Regime in Uruguay,” Date Unknown. NACLA 4.
  \item \textsuperscript{14}Letter to Bobbye Ortiz from Yvelise Macchi, August 30, 1984. Bobbye Ortiz Papers.
  \item \textsuperscript{15}The group also later opened offices in Boston, Massachusetts and Washington D.C. See, Committee in Solidarity with the Uruguayan People (CSUP), “Uruguay Newsletter,” vol. 2, no. 1 (January 1981). NACLA 6.
  \item \textsuperscript{16}CSUP, “Uruguay Newsletter,” vol. 1, no. 2 (June 1979). NACLA 6.
\end{itemize}
of international networking and transnational alliances. They also used their position as US citizens in order to put pressure on the dictatorship by exposing its tactics. However, the CSUP did not merely argue for the importance of US public opinion or present their organization as paternalistically helping Uruguayans. They also declared their international solidarity with the Uruguayan people.\(^\text{17}\)

Most newsletters distributed by the CSUP described Uruguay in order to familiarize activists with the historical and geographical details of the country. Indeed, CSUP’s “Uruguay Newsletter” commonly presented a brief history of the country and located it on a map.\(^\text{18}\) However, while activists may not have initially been familiar with particulars concerning Uruguay, this does not mean that they knew nothing of the country’s political situation. For example, Amnesty International alone collected over 360,000 signatures from seventy countries in its campaign against political repression in Uruguay.\(^\text{19}\) When describing Uruguay’s history, the CSUP’s materials touted the country’s former reputation as a beacon of democracy and liberty. The authors of the newsletter accentuated how much the once democratic country had changed and offered statistics about the rising number of political prisoners in Uruguay. Indeed, CSUP’s materials used Amnesty International’s statistics to note that in 1976 the proportion of political prisoners to the overall Uruguayan population proved to be the largest in the world.\(^\text{20}\)

The CSUP also forged connections with groups of exiled Uruguayans such as the Grupo de Convergencia Democrática en Uruguay (CDU). The CDU, made up of different religious, political and social groups hoped to restore Uruguayan democracy by working not only with citizens in their own country but also with international groups such as the CSUP.\(^\text{21}\) The CDU argued for the importance of developing relationships with democratic groups and governments throughout the world that supported the freedom of the Uruguayan people. The CDU also emerged in part to put pressure on the Uruguayan government to create a reasonable “time table” for the return to democracy. In turn, the US based CSUP included documents from the CDU in their newsletters and also received information about the situation

\(^{17}\) CSUP, “Uruguay Newsletter,” 4.


in Uruguay from the group.22 Thus, the incorporation of the CDU’s materials demonstrated willingness on the part of some US groups to collaborate with and include the voices of Uruguayan activists.23

During the mid 1970s, groups similar to the CSUP also emerged in Canada such as the Toronto based Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Uruguay (CDHRU).24 Like the CSUP, the CDHRU did not focus their activism on leftist solidarity but rather used letter writing campaigns and created pamphlets and newsletters to raise awareness about the dire situation of human rights in Uruguay. For example, in an effort to free Uruguay’s political prisoners, CDHRU leader Professor Kenneth J. Golby of York University in Toronto wrote to the president of Uruguay, Juan María Bordaberry, about the inhumane treatment of prisoners (many of whom were Tupamaros). Listing the names of seventeen prisoners, including Tupamaro leader Raúl Sendic, Golby contended that reliable sources such as the International Red Cross reported the methodical torture of prisoners.25 Golby also compared Uruguayan prison conditions with that of Nazi concentration camps.26 The professor invoked the history of Uruguay in his appeal to Bordaberry, arguing, “torture and dehumanization are not worthy of a nation with a history like that of Uruguay.”27 Therefore, Golby used Uruguay’s historical reputation as a shining example of democracy in Latin America as a means to shame Bordaberry and the Uruguayan government’s actions.

Proving that the influence of international opinion may have initially carried some clout with the Uruguayan president, Bordaberry responded to Golby’s letter within a few weeks. Bordaberry’s response demonstrates the influence of international movements in the early years of the dictatorship, if


24 CDHRU, “Objectives,” no. 17 (October 1976): 17. NACLA 5. The group originated to continue the work started by the Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners in Uruguay (CDPPU).


26 One method activists used to critique human rights violations in Uruguay was comparing the country’s treatment of prisoners to Nazi concentration camps. An article entitled, “Los Campos de Concentracio de la Dictadura Uruguaya” (“The Concentration Camps of the Uruguayan Dictatorship”) argues that the percentage of the population of political prisoners in Uruguay was higher than that of Hitler’s Germany. Thus, activists grouped the regime with Nazi Germany in order to stress the extreme ways in which human rights had been violated in the country. See “Los Campos de Concentracio de la Dictadura Uruguaya,” De Frente, no. 8, Date Unknown, 18-19. NACLA 6.

27 Letter from Kenneth Golby to Juan María Bordaberry.
not necessarily to change policy but to garner the attention of leaders concerned with Uruguay’s global image. If anything, the president of Uruguay understood the power of transnational activists’ publicity and their possible connections with Uruguayan leftists. Indeed, the Uruguayan government responded in large part because it could not afford to ignore the vociferous denunciations from human rights groups.

In his response to Golby, Bordaberry admitted that he usually did not reply to the campaigns of international groups because they commonly only wished to propagate world communism.28 By taking this stance, Bordaberry hid behind a simplistic Cold War refrain that any dissent or critique of a government should be discounted as mere communist conspiracy. In his letter to Golby, Bordaberry also contends that the arrests of people whom he called subversives (from a movement he never specifically names) have been wrongly represented in so-called international propaganda.29 According to Bordaberry, these subversive betrayers sold out to foreign interests.30 Bordaberry even goes so far as to argue that the Tupamaros received funding from communist organizations and support groups throughout the world while the Uruguayan government had no outside assistance.

Undoubtedly, the Cuban Revolution influenced the Tupamaros and exchange occurred between the Cuban government and the group.31 Some Tupamaros eventually escaped to Cuba and others trained in the country before coming back to Uruguay to join the Tupamaros.32 However, the Tupamaros also accentuated their ideological independence and strategic differences from Cuba, particularly in the form of urban guerrilla warfare. Some Tupamaros engaged in a debate with Cubans about the true possibilities of the successes of urban guerrilla warfare.33 Therefore, while the Cuban Revolution had an important influence on the Tupamaros, they also developed their own revolutionary tactics.

28 Letter from Juan María Bordaberry to Kenneth Golby, February 12, 1975. NACLA 5.

29 Letter from Juan María Bordaberry to Kenneth Golby. The Uruguayan government forbade the use of the word “Tupamaro.” The government only allowed the press to refer to the Tupamaros as criminals, prisoners, etc. The press eventually became so frightened of the new censorship laws that they began to refer to the Tupamaros as the “unmentionables.” See Wilson, The Tupamaros, 33.

30 Letter from Juan María Bordaberry to Kenneth Golby.

31 While some work has been done concerning the transnational connections between Cubans and guerrilla groups in South America, the relationship between Cubans and the Tupamaros has not yet been fully explored. See Jean Rodrigues Sales, “O impacto da revolução cubana sobre as organizações comunistas brasileiras (1959-1974)” (PhD diss., Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP), 2005).

32 By the end of 1972, over a thousand Tupamaros had fled to Cuba, Argentina or Chile. In Cuba and Chile, Fidel Castro and Salvador Allende, respectively, offered the Tupamaros economic and political support. See Arrarás, “Armed Struggle,” 215-16.

33 Castañeda, Utopia Unarmed, 79.
Furthermore, according to Bordaberry, due to the middle class status of many Uruguayans and their supposed racial purity (Bordaberry stressed that the population descended from the first Spanish colonists or from other European immigrants) Uruguay did not deserve the attacks from the Tupamaros. Indeed, Bordaberry’s government took issue with any ethnic diversity in Uruguay and attempted to render Afro-Uruguayans completely invisible in the country. Within a year of his letter to Golby, Bordaberry’s government arranged the forced removal of Afro-Uruguayans from their homes in the center of Montevideo. Romero Jorge Rodríguez argues that the relocation of Afro-Uruguayans into abandoned warehouses and factories on the fringe of the city had little to do with the unsafe conditions of buildings they inhabited. Instead, he postulates that the underlying motive of the dictatorship was to separate groups of those of Afro-Uruguayan descent and prevent the influence of their culture in Montevideo.

While Bordaberry dispensed untruths in his letter to Golby, the fact that he responded at all demonstrates that during the 1970s the Uruguayan government hoped to protect its reputation and fight against the influence of international activists. Bordaberry’s letter to Golby, which was widely published in Latin America, also inspired some left wing Uruguayan activists to reach out to North Americans. For example, in 1975 Frente Amplio Senator Zelmar Michelini sent a letter to Professor Golby refuting Bordaberry’s claims. Michelini, originally a Colorado party minister and senator, later renounced the Uruguayan dictatorship’s actions and participated in the founding of the Frente Amplio.

During his lifetime, Michelini connected with numerous international activists, including with Professor Golby. A little less than a year before he was murdered, Michelini wrote to Golby criticizing Bordaberry’s letter. The senator assured Golby that he was not being used in a communist campaign but rather committing to fighting for a just cause. Michelini also wrote to Golby about specific

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34 Letter from Juan María Bordaberry to Kenneth Golby.
35 Rodríguez, “Afro Populations of America’s Southern Cone,” 325.
36 Rodríguez, “Afro Populations of America’s Southern Cone,” 325.
37 Markarian, Left in Transformation, 78.
39 Markarian, Left in Transformation, 38.
40 Letter from Zelmar Michelini to Kenneth Golby.
mechanisms of torture and included descriptions in his letters. Like the CSUP’s incorporation of its correspondence with the Uruguayan CDU, Golby’s group later used some of Michelini’s testimony and descriptions in their newsletter revealing the human rights abuses in Uruguay.\footnote{CDHRU, “The Situation,” 12-15.} Invoking ideas of universal human rights and solidarity, in one of his letters Michelini also applauded Golby for being an activist who “reacts to the suffering and persecution of another human being anywhere in the world as if it were [his] own.”\footnote{Letter from Zelmar Michelini to Kenneth Golby.} Thus, Michelini demonstrated obvious respect for Golby because of his willingness to speak out against injustice and forge international ties with those in Latin America. This exchange represented an instance of reciprocal bonds forged between activists committed to changing and challenging the dictatorship in Uruguay.

A day before the June 27, 1973 coup in Uruguay, Michelini fled to Buenos Aires, Argentina. From exile, he began a campaign of transnational opposition to the Uruguayan dictatorship. Vania Markarian refers to Michelini as joining “with international actors who could help discredit the Uruguayan regime before the broadest audience possible.”\footnote{Markarian, Left in Transformation, 76.} Indeed, by the mid 1970s, Michelini hoped to visit Washington D.C. to denounce the human rights violations in his country. However, thanks to coordination between the Uruguayan and Argentine governments, Michelini’s passport was suspended.\footnote{Markarian, Left in Transformation, 81.}

On the evening of May 18, 1976, Argentine soldiers kidnapped Michelini. One of Michelini’s contacts in the US, scholar and activist Louise Popkin, called the US State Department and international organizations to report the events.\footnote{Louise Popkin established international solidarity with Uruguayan activists after spending a sabbatical year in Buenos Aires. After learning that a friend was jailed because of her ties with the Tupamaros, Popkin wanted to help uncover the dire situation of Uruguayan political prisoners. Popkin was put in contact with Michelini and tried to arrange his journey to Washington D.C. She also translated and disseminated Michelini’s writings to US organizations concerned with human rights. See Markarian, Left in Transformation, 79.} Unfortunately, the State Department did nothing to help. A few days later Michelini’s body appeared along with the President of the Chamber of Uruguayan Deputies, Héctor Gutiérrez Ruiz, and two former Tupamaros. Since regimes in Argentina and Uruguay usually targeted lesser known figures for murder, the reasons for Michelini’s assassination prove complex. Most likely, the Uruguayan government’s fear of the consequences of Michelini’s international associations with
human rights advocates caused his murder. However, human rights activism did not represent the only way in which international activists expressed solidarity towards Uruguayans. Some groups focused specifically on leftist issues and formed transnational coalitions to further their political agendas.

**Leftist Solidarity with Uruguay**

Demonstrating the nuances within international solidarity organizations, some US groups denounced the Uruguayan dictatorship and also focused their activism on leftist politics. For example, the New York branch of the Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners in Uruguay (which later changed its name to the Uruguay Information Group) focused on issues of labor and leftist activism. The group’s bulletin, *Uruguay News*, begun in 1977, printed articles in both Spanish and English.

The primary issues of the organization included the desire to end torture in Uruguay; free political prisoners; restore civil liberties; legalize the Uruguayan labor union Convención Nacional de Trabajadores (CNT); prosecute responsible parties for repression of citizens and form a government that represented what they called the popular forces. Therefore, the Uruguayan Information Group moved beyond primarily focusing on human rights activism and also hoped to advance leftist politics.

*Uruguay News* examined the effects of the dictatorship on the working class in Uruguay. The bulletin offered a forum to attack Uruguayan “de-nationalization” or the support of private ownership in industry, a concern for many in the left. According to the *Uruguay News*, the dictatorship planned to sell the country to foreign interests, as evidenced by a full page ad taken out in the *New York Times* by the Uruguayan government. The ad reassured interested parties that US investments were secure in Uruguay. To those at the *Uruguay News*, courting the financial investments of US businesses accentuated that the Uruguayan dictatorship supported economic liberalism. By linking US foreign investments to the Uruguayan dictatorship, US leftists discovered another angle to critique increasing

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46 Markarian, *Left in Transformation*, 82.


worldwide economic liberalization. The Uruguay News also reported on more than US economic influence as they uncovered cases of alleged CIA participation in the dictatorship.\textsuperscript{51}

The leftist organization Chicago Area Group on Latin America (CAGLA) also claimed to uncover the influence of US corporations in Uruguay by listing the numerous companies found in the country.\textsuperscript{52} This list included an explanation of what the corporations manufactured and offered in Uruguay.\textsuperscript{53} Concerned activists could therefore read about which companies had infiltrated Uruguay and subsequently critique neo-liberal economic policies in Latin America. Thus, US groups fighting for human rights in Uruguay also utilized the struggle to condemn their own government’s foreign and economic policies. These criticisms demonstrate the multifaceted forms of activism and mechanisms of solidarity within the US left concerning Uruguay.

Beyond criticizing the Uruguayan dictatorship’s links with the US, international solidarity organizations also compared Uruguayan prisons and the dictatorship to other allegedly repressive regimes such as South Africa. Grouping these governments together gave US activists the opportunity to fight against racism as well as critique the Uruguayan dictatorship. For example, when Uruguayan ex-senator Ferreira Aldunate traveled to the US in order to garner support against the dictatorship he referred to the Uruguayan government as totalitarian and disavowed its identification with South Africa.\textsuperscript{54}

Groups such as the New York Circus, a Christian organization which provided educational materials for progressive activists in the US, critiqued Uruguay’s ties with South Africa. The organization reported that the Uruguayan dictatorship found friends in the “most tyrannical and repressive governments in the world” such as South Africa and Rhodesia.\textsuperscript{55} They also argued that while the United Nations and world opinion condemned apartheid, the Uruguayan dictatorship had strengthened its bonds with the government of South Africa. Indeed, the New York Circus reported that

\textsuperscript{51} Uruguay Information Group, \textit{Uruguay News}, 15.

\textsuperscript{52} Based in Chicago, CAGLA sought solidarity with the “struggle for liberation” throughout Latin America. The organization included members from both the US and Latin America. They collected materials from Latin America in order to distribute them to leftists in the Midwest. Thus, the group primarily promoted solidarity with Latin American struggles through the translation of leftist documents from Latin America for US leftists.


after the 1973 coup in Uruguay, South Africa deposited large amounts of money in Uruguay’s Central Bank. Therefore, according to the New York Circus the dictatorship not only repressed its people but allowed itself to be bought by the racist regime of South Africa.\footnote{The New York Circus, “Uruguay,” 14.} Beyond economic relationships, members of the New York Circus argued that Montevideo’s strategic position made it an asset in the global scheme for the alignment of strong anti-communist governments, which they argued often tolerated torture and apartheid.\footnote{The New York Circus, “Uruguay,” 13.} Therefore, leftist solidarity groups linked the racist policies of South Africa to Uruguay in order to demonstrate the depravity of both regimes. This strategy stressed the corruption of the Uruguayan dictatorship and also provided a mechanism to critique racism. Once again, however, while leftists vehemently criticized South Africa’s policies they failed to examine issues of race in Uruguay. Thus, members of the Uruguayan and US left identified with the struggles of people of African descent everywhere but within Uruguay.

With the help of Uruguayan exiles, the regime’s association with South Africa received further international condemnation. One group, the Uruguayan Association Against Racism and Apartheid (UAARU) based in Geneva, Switzerland, argued that Uruguay’s ties with South Africa ran counter to the Uruguayan people’s “anti-racist traditions.”\footnote{Uruguayan Association Against Racism and Apartheid (UAARA), “The Policy of Co-Operation with the South African Regime in Uruguay,” Date Unknown, 2. NACLA 4.} While this particular group of Uruguayan exiles still ignored the oppression of Afro-Uruguayans, they also deviated from the usual rhetoric by at least acknowledging Uruguay’s multiracial composition. Thus, the UAARA represented one of the few activists groups abroad or within Uruguay that acknowledged the multiracial composition of the country.\footnote{UAARA, “The Policy,” 2.}

The UAARA reported that the South African government began courting Uruguay as an ally for tactical, economic, diplomatic and social reasons as early as 1966. The group also noted that both the South African and Uruguayan governments purported to reject discrimination in support of apartheid, which supposedly respected racial differences.\footnote{UAARA, “The Policy,” 4.} Therefore, Uruguay emphasized their rejection of racism and touted the familiar refrain that no such social problems existed in Uruguay. The UAARA
reported that propaganda within Uruguay presented the South African government as a victim, unjustly persecuted by international human rights groups. Due to their supposedly unfair persecution from international organizations, both Uruguay and South Africa claimed to be at the mercy of terrorists and behaved accordingly to maintain internal security. Thus, the governments of South Africa and Uruguay argued that any criticisms against them derived solely from subversive forces that lacked any understanding of the real situation in their respective countries.61

The UAARA also contended that the relationship between South Africa and Uruguay was so influential that it altered Uruguay’s voting patterns within the United Nations.62 The positions that Uruguay took within the UN demonstrated that they hoped to (somewhat) distance themselves from South Africa. However, the UAARA insisted that the Uruguayan government also found ways to continue to ally itself with South Africa. When Uruguay’s sentiments deviated from the majority, which condemned South Africa, it abstained from voting or did not participate instead of casting a negative vote. Therefore, the Uruguayan government slyly supported South Africa without completely discrediting itself by flagrantly allying with the much maligned regime.63

In a pamphlet about the Uruguayan dictatorship and its ties to South Africa, the UAARA further pointed out the similarities between the two countries by referring to South African Prime Minister B.J. Vorster’s speech to the Uruguayan people. In his speech Vorster assured Uruguayans, “Our cooperation can be developed at all levels because we are the same kind of men.”64 Thus, as part of their denunciations of the Uruguayan dictatorship, international leftist groups pointed to the country’s close ties with the racist regime of South Africa. Criticizing the relationship between Uruguay and South Africa demonstrated one of the ways in which activists showed their solidarity with Uruguayan resistance and also supported other elements of progressive politics. However, while international leftists somewhat examined issues of race within their activism concerning Uruguay, they usually ignored or stereotyped the gendered experiences of female political prisoners. Some exceptions to this sexist treatment existed, such as the feminist organization Women’s International Resource Exchange (WIRE) which prioritized the campaigns of female political prisoners.

Gender and Solidarity

While some in the US left offered solidarity to Uruguayans through various political strategies, leftist Uruguayans also sought connections with activists in the United States, even relatively obscure feminist organizations. One such example of this is found in an eleven page letter written in 1984 to US feminist Bobbye Ortiz from Yvelise Macchi, who pleaded for international help for the release of her sister Yessie, an imprisoned Tupamara.65 Yvelise Macchi hoped that contacting Ortiz’s New York based organization, WIRE, could help garner support for her sister’s cause. As a transnational group which claimed to combine anti-imperialist activism with feminism, WIRE deviated from the focus of most organizations concerned with human rights in Uruguay. This may have been one reason why Macchi’s family reached out to WIRE, as they believed the group would prioritize a campaign to free the Tupamara.

WIRE, founded in 1979 by feminist Bobbye Ortiz, tackled the issue of white, Western feminist supremacy by vowing to dissolve the supposed connection between feminism and imperialism. WIRE’s 1984 statement of purpose posits, “It is our conviction that authentic feminism implies a commitment not only to ourselves and our sisters in this country, but also to our sisters globally, especially in the Third World.”66 This global solidarity movement focused much of its attention on women’s issues in Latin America and had specific roots in a transnational feminist solidarity organization called Action for Women in Chile (AFWIC).

AFWIC was created after the overthrow of the socialist Salvador Allende government by General Augusto Pinochet on September 11, 1973. The group, officially formed in November 1974 in New York, was comprised of both Latin American and US feminists. Though AFWIC prioritized attacking the dictatorship in Chile, they also promoted anti-imperialism within the women’s movement and hoped to stop the gender specific abuses of female Chilean political prisoners.67 After four years of working with AFWIC, Ortiz realized that she had learned sufficient organizational lessons to enable her to create WIRE, also based in New York. At its inception, WIRE’s nine member collective reprinted

65 Letter from Yvelise Macchi to Bobbye Ortiz, August 30, 1984. Bobbye Ortiz Papers.
67 Wire Statement, Plenary Session.
materials about women in the so-called Third World, some of which were written by women in non-industrialized countries." Though primarily written in English for their North American feminist audience, WIRE produced and reproduced materials about Latin American feminism and Latin American women’s lives. A Fall 1982 WIRE catalog featured a quote from Saralee Hamilton of the Nationwide Women’s Program of the American Friends Service Committee. Writing about how WIRE’s publications influenced her group’s activism, Hamilton noted, “We rely on WIRE to provide a continuing source of invaluable connection with the indigenous voices of Third World Women in struggles on every continent. The timeliness and accessibility of WIRE’s material challenges and enables North American feminists to operate from a truly global perspective.” This illustrates that WIRE helped to offer some North American feminists a more nuanced international perspective.

Primarily through books and pamphlets, WIRE illuminated aspects of Latin American women’s lives to US feminists. At a time when US feminists wanted to reach out in solidarity to feminists in the non-industrial world and conceptualize feminism from a less Western centric perspective, WIRE offered a forum to explore Latin American women’s experiences. Thus, WIRE sought to end imperialism and forge transnational connections and understanding between women worldwide. Therefore, it is understandable that Macchi reached out to WIRE as it defined itself as an anti-imperialist, international women’s organization which focused a great deal of its activism on Latin America.

In the letter to WIRE, Yvelise Macchi presented a detailed synopsis of her sister Yessie’s experiences during her twelve years of imprisonment. Yvelise wrote to Ortiz in order to appeal to her

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68 Wire Statement, Plenary Session.


70 WIRE Pamphlet. Bobbye Ortiz Papers.

71 The problem of articulating “experience” has been debated within the field of Latin American history, particularly in the controversy surrounding Rigoberta Menchú’s memoir I, Rigoberta Menchú, which was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In these debates, scholars questioned the “truth” of Menchú’s recollection of her experiences in Guatemala. For more on the controversy surrounding Menchú see Arturo Arias, ed., The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). See also Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” Critical Inquiry, 17, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 773-797 and Chandra Talpade Mohanty “Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience” in Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates, ed. Michele Barrett and Anne Phillips (London: Polity Press, 1992), 74-93.

“solidarity, requesting your help to obtain her freedom.”

Though the letter was dated August 30th, 1984 and Uruguay was progressing towards democracy, Yessie remained imprisoned under standards that violated human rights codes. In her letter, Yvelise stressed the arbitrary nature of Yessie’s detention and the deterioration of her health while in prison. Believing that US pressure and opinion could influence the Uruguayan government, Yvelise appealed to Ortiz and WIRE to support a campaign to sponsor Yessie’s freedom. Yvelise included in her request the names and addresses of military authorities, political leaders and newspapers for Ortiz and the members of WIRE to contact.

As an international solidarity organization that focused on Latin America, WIRE members probably already knew something about Yessie and her role in the Tupamaros. Indeed, Yessie was somewhat well known in leftist circles in North America. For example, a *Latin America and Empire Report* on “Women in Struggle,” published in 1972 by the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) featured Macchi on the cover. The NACLA report described Macchi as a Tupamaro leader and argued that she represented one of many types of struggle in which Latin American women participated. While NACLA referred to Yessie Macchi as a Tupamaro leader, ironically most publications consistently featured the top leaders of the Tupamaros as: Raúl Sendic; José Mujica Cordano; Adolfo Wassen Alaniz; Eleuterio Huidobro; Maurice Rosencoff, Julio Marenales or other men. Thus, most international solidarity publications wrote about the importance of freeing male leaders, but rarely women. One bulletin released by the Comité de Información Sobre la Represión en Uruguay contained a list of arrested Tupamaro leaders and had the portraits of important members such as Sendic, Mujica and Huidobro along with descriptions of their jobs, political affiliations and number of children. In this particular bulletin, eight arrested Tupamaro women, in a similar situation to their male counterparts, only had their names listed. While these women fought and got arrested just as the

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73 Letter from Yvelise Macchi to Bobbye Ortiz.
74 Letter from Yvelise Macchi to Bobbye Ortiz.
75 Letter from Yvelise Macchi to Bobbye Ortiz.
77 See for example Comité de Información Sobre la Represión en Uruguay, “Uruguay; los rehenes del fascismo,” 197_. NACLA 6.
78 For a fuller discussion about male dominated leadership in the Tupamaros see Chapter Five.
identified men, the Tupamaras did not receive a description or portrait, just their names with a sketch of barbed wire beneath. Yessie was considered of such low standing that the bulletin writers misspelled her name as “Dessie.”

Indeed, most international solidarity groups generally discounted the significance of the contributions of Tupamaras or supported traditional gender constructions of female political prisoners. For example, the Toronto based organization, Grupo de Apoyo a la Resistencia Uruguay (GARU) or Group for the Support of the Uruguayan Resistance focused primarily on leftist resistance and presented female political prisoners in a specifically gendered way. Most of GARU’s members were exiles from Uruguay who immigrated to North America in order to escape the dictatorship. The group printed materials in both Spanish and English for Uruguayan exiles and the greater North American public. GARU’s bilingual publication Banda Oriental helped to create a diverse audience throughout the Western Hemisphere. With this publication, exiles hoped to disseminate information about as many groups as possible, particularly other Latin American organizations. While GARU supported a worldwide transnational alliance of Uruguayan exiles, the group also understood the significance of allying with groups throughout North America and Europe. GARU specifically published their newsletter in English in order to reach a larger audience and forge transnational connections with activists in the US and Canada.

Therefore, despite blaming Uruguay’s problems on what they called imperialist powers, GARU understood that people inside of the US, Canada and Europe also actively sought solidarity with Latin American leftists. Along with groups in the United States and Canada, GARU also called for Latin Americans to put aside their differences in order to unite against repression and imperialism. Using a language steeped in transnationalism, GARU’s members argued that borders only existed on maps. These borders and divisions allowed imperialism and national oligarchies to dominate (which in turn created dictatorships throughout South America). Therefore, the group believed that if they remained

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81 More than 14% of the population left Uruguay between 1964 and 1981. See Markarian, Left in Transformation, 5 and Carlos Fortuna, Nelly Niedworok, and Adela Pellegrino, Uruguay y la emigracion de los 70 (Montevideo: CIEU/EBO, 1988).


83 GARU, Banda Oriental, no. 3 (December 1974): 3-5. NACLA 1.

divided from other Latin American organizations, they could never triumph against the perceived enemy (imperialist supported dictatorships). Using Marxist rhetoric, GARU members argued that the dominant classes ultimately forced them out of their homes and into other countries. These members reported that they planned to return to their homes as soon as the dictatorship ended. Therefore, members of GARU had a vested interest in seeing the quick cessation of the dictatorship.

While on the surface most of the language in GARU’s Banda Oriental concerning resistance and conditions under torture appears gender neutral, closer analysis reveals the gendered nature of the representation of women prisoners. For example, general sections concerning the “Situation in the Prisons” in actuality only referred to male prisoners. Banda reported that Uruguayan jails deprived male political prisoners of food and tobacco and limited visits with parents, wives, children and siblings. Another smaller section analyzed the situation of women prisoners and focused on very different deprivations for women prisoners than those of their male counterparts (food and tobacco). The GARU bulletin lamented that for female prisoners, “photos of children or engagement rings are prohibited.” Therefore, while most of the materials concerning the Uruguayan resistance movement superficially made no distinctions between women and men prisoners, reports of female prisoners focused on traditional ideas of what should be significant to women—motherhood and marriage. Thus, Banda presented traditionally feminine items as more important to women than food or other essential materials.

The gendered presentation of male and female prisoners occurred in other materials about human rights violations in Uruguay. Another bulletin about women’s treatment in prison reported that visitors to women’s prisons shockingly had the same restrictions as men. The focus of women’s visits, however, remained on motherhood. The bulletin reported that mothers could not hand their children anything during visits. For instance, one mother who dared to give her sick child a handkerchief to blow

85 GARU, Banda Oriental, 2.
86 GARU, Banda Oriental, 2.
88 GARU, Banda Oriental, 7.
89 GARU, Banda Oriental, 8.
his nose was sentenced to solitary confinement and lost visits with him.91 This anecdote demonstrated for the reader another way in which the Uruguayan government treated prisoners cruelly. Though the treatment of women prisoners was undeniably horrible, once again, solidarity groups focused on different issues of importance for male and female prisoners. The pain of incarcerated mothers appeared to be much more significant than that of fathers in prison who rarely saw their children.92

Despite the stereotypical gendered images of female prisoners, GARU deviated from other international solidarity groups by also occasionally providing a forum that at least acknowledged Latin American women’s issues. In doing so, Banda diverged from the focus of most Uruguayan leftist publications of the time and particularly away from the main interests of human rights organizations pertaining to Uruguay. A section in Banda entitled “Latin American Women” argued that the struggle of Latin American women was part of a larger fight of all Latin Americans against imperialism.93 Using a Marxist inspired interpretation of women’s oppression, the article blamed “foreign interests” and “national oligarchies” for discrimination against women. Criticisms mainly focused on issues of labor—pay discrepancies, discrimination against female workers because of pregnancy or possible pregnancy as well as high rates of illiteracy.94 Banda blamed outside forces like capitalism or individual rulers for the problems of women’s oppression.95 Therefore, like most leftist interpretations of the oppression of women during the 1970s, the authors focused on changing women’s roles and not men’s.96

Along with blaming a great deal of Latin American women’s inequalities on dictatorships, Banda also focused on the exploitation of children. The writers of Banda claimed that under dictatorships the future of women and children proved insecure and unstable. Though significant issues, the angle employed to critique women’s oppression focused on traditional notions of maternity and primarily

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94 GARU, Banda Oriental, 1.
95 GARU, Banda Oriental, 1.
blamed the dictatorship. The article’s authors lamented that “[d]eprived of social rights and anguished by the future of their children, women of Latin America are joining to protest their fate as women and mothers.” Tellingly, there seems to be no distinction between women’s fate as women and as mothers. They appear to be one and the same. Indeed, despite their rhetoric of equality, even progressive publications such as Banda reinforced traditional ideas about politically active women.

In contrast to GARU and other leftist solidarity groups, as an “anti-imperialist” feminist organization, WIRE did not support stereotypical images of Latin American women or discount the specific experiences of female political prisoners. Unlike most leftist groups involved with issues of international solidarity, WIRE prioritized the campaigns of imprisoned political women. Indeed, despite some general knowledge of Yessie’s situation, most campaigns for Uruguayan prisoners often placed more importance on the imprisonment of male Tupamaro leaders. Despite most organizations’ focus on male prisoners, even after twelve years, Yvelise continued to fight for her sister’s freedom and reached out to sources she hoped would influence the Uruguayan government’s decisions.

In order to educate WIRE members on Yessie’s prison conditions, Yvelise did not employ common statistics concerning human rights or use lofty political rhetoric. Instead, she included a biography and personal letters from Yessie to her family. The biography sent to WIRE revealed that in 1977 Yessie gave birth to her daughter Paloma while in jail. The father was Yessie’s companion and fellow political prisoner Mario Walter Soto, who died of cancer while imprisoned in 1980. What this letter to WIRE did not reveal, however, was the situation concerning how Yessie became pregnant while in prison. Indeed, thanks to facilitation by certain prison guards, Yessie and Mario had secret rendezvous while incarcerated. When the Uruguayan government found out about these meetings, guards threatened violence on Yessie in order to make her lose the baby. However, Yessie threatened to inform international organizations of the Uruguayan government’s plan to terminate her pregnancy, which in

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97 For a fuller discussion of issues of maternity and Uruguayan women’s political role see Chapter Five.


99 Letter from Yvelise Macchi to Bobbye Ortiz.

100 Letter from Yvelise Macchi to Bobbye Ortiz.

turn intimidated officials into allowing Yessie to carry her baby to term.\textsuperscript{102} Petitions from international organizations also enabled Paloma to remain with her mother for eight months in prison until she was handed over to her maternal grandparents.\textsuperscript{103}

Included in the packet to WIRE was also what Yessie wrote about Paloma’s life without her parents. She lamented the separation from her daughter writing that “[w]e cannot offer her a rose colored world nor an easy life, nor even a normal family. We cannot save her from her quota of tears and sorrows, nor from the wounds of a warm heart. We can only offer her this handful of tenderness and a long look, so that she will know for whom and by whom she lives.”\textsuperscript{104} Therefore, in her plea to WIRE, Yvelise included excerpts from Yessie’s letters to her family to demonstrate the inhumanity of her sister’s situation. Including Yessie’s statements about her daughter, day to day life in prison and her inner thoughts differed from previous solidarity campaigns that focused on more generalized accounts of prison life. Yessie’s letters eloquently convey the despair of separation from her loved ones and musings on loneliness.\textsuperscript{105} By including Yessie’s letters and offering a specific character study of her sister, Yvelise appealed to the sensitivity and humanity of activists in the United States. Thus, Macchi’s family’s campaign for her freedom focused on interpersonal relationships and the importance of reuniting loved ones.\textsuperscript{106}

However, the materials Yvelise included in her plea to WIRE contained a surprisingly genderless tone as they focused on the bonds of families, not specifically mothers. The letters ignore the usual stereotypes of a mother’s natural need to be with her children and instead suggested that both men and women require contact with their loved ones. Indeed, Yvelise’s campaign for her sister did not rely on essentialist ideas about women’s natural roles as mothers. While Yessie’s role as a mother was included

\begin{footnotes}
\item[102] Werner, “Entrevista a Yessie Macchi.” Threatening to involve international organizations would not have carried the same weight in countries like Chile and especially Argentina which murdered imprisoned mothers and/or took their children away. For more see Michelle Bonner, \textit{Sustaining Human Rights: Women and Argentine Human Rights Organizations} (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

\item[103] Letter from Yvelise Macchi to Bobbye Ortiz.

\item[104] Letter from Yvelise Macchi to Bobbye Ortiz.

\item[105] Letter from Yvelise Macchi to Bobbye Ortiz.

\item[106] Letter from Yvelise Macchi to Bobbye Ortiz.
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in her biography, most of Yessie’s letters focus on her own emotional and existentialist struggles in prison.\textsuperscript{107}

The creative composition of Yvelise’s letter and campaign for Yessie’s freedom seem appropriate considering the unusual life of the Tupamara. Macchi did not live a common life restrained by the usual gendered constructions of her time and culture. As a child she lived with her family in the United States for three and a half years, and as a young teenager she became politicized by the leftist tracts and books she read.\textsuperscript{108} She also lived in Cuba for some time in the late 1960s where she joined with radical groups and learned about armed combat. The well-traveled and well-read Yessie escaped twice from imprisonment, once in the famous operation “Estrella.”\textsuperscript{109}

Unfortunately, North American and other international campaigns for Yessie throughout the 1970s and early 1980s failed to win her freedom. Yessie was finally released along with 250 other political prisoners after the official end of the dictatorship in 1985.\textsuperscript{110} There are several possible reasons for the Uruguayan government’s reticence to release Yessie along with other political prisoners throughout the early 1980s. Indeed, Yessie had received revolutionary training in Cuba, outwitted officials and conceived a child while in prison and escaped incarceration several times. Most of all, however, she challenged patriarchal authority as the press appointed female “leader” of the Tupamaros who continuously disobeyed Uruguayan authorities.\textsuperscript{111} Despite the insistence of the Uruguayan government to keep Yessie imprisoned, her family continued to fight for her freedom by looking to international organizations. The Macchi family’s connections with activists in the United States, such as the feminist group WIRE, demonstrate the ways in which Uruguayans reached out to US activists in search of solidarity.

Another instance of activists in Uruguay reaching out to feminists in the US is the collaboration between El Grupo de Estudios sobre la Condicion de la Mujer en Uruguay (GRECMU) and feminists from the Centro de la Tribuna Internacional de la Mujer (CTIM) in New York City. GRECMU, one of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{107} Letter from Yvelise Macchi to Bobbye Ortiz.
  \item \textsuperscript{108} Soler, \textit{La Leyenda}, 12.
  \item \textsuperscript{109} Soler, \textit{La Leyenda}, 69.
  \item \textsuperscript{110} Most political prisoners had been released in the years leading up to the end of the dictatorship. See Alan Riding, “For Freed Leftists in Uruguay, Hidden Terrors,” NYT, March 7, 1985.
  \item \textsuperscript{111} For a fuller discussion of the gender specific punishments female political prisoners received because they deviated from traditional patriarchal notions of femininity see Chapter Five.
\end{itemize}
the most well known feminist organizations in Uruguay, emerged in 1979 as a discussion group about Uruguayan women and labor. The group analyzed issues of women’s labor not solely from a socialist perspective but from an individual, feminist one. Indeed, in one statement GRECMU argued that the struggle for gender equality consisted of an individual, collective and interior process.\footnote{112} GRECMU named their bulletin *La Cacerola* or “the casserole” because of its correspondence with the daily work and lives of women and as a homage to activism under the dictatorship. As people protested the government’s repression the “cacerola” or casserole became a symbol of national liberation. During the dictatorship, “Caceroleos” consisted of citizens’ nightly bashing of pots and pans.\footnote{113} GRECMU members argued that it was no coincidence that a traditional symbol of female oppression transformed into a sign of resistance during the dictatorship. They claimed that under authoritarian rule the private space of the home became a site where everyone, no matter what gender, could collectively participate in rebellion against repression.\footnote{114}

With an office in New York, CTIM published the bulletin *La Tribuna* three times a year and offered the publication free to women from what they called the “Third World.”\footnote{115} The collaboration of the CTIM and GRECMU occurred primarily through letters. Together the groups created a manual of techniques to facilitate consciousness raising groups for women in Uruguay. By integrating each others suggestions, US and Uruguayan feminists participated in a reciprocal exchange and created feminist activities that incorporated ideas from both groups. Therefore, while Uruguayan feminists utilized some of the techniques North American feminists employed, they also advocated seeing their society as distinct in order to avoid generalizations about women’s experiences. The collaboration of these groups proved to be truly transnational as their combined publication was produced by the International Development Research Center in Ottawa, Canada.\footnote{116}

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112 *La Cacerola*, vol. 2, no. 4 (May 1985): 1. CEDINCI.


114 *La Cacerola*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1984): 3. CEDINCI. While the “casserole” represented subversion during the dictatorship, according to GRECMU, Uruguayan society also associated the casserole or domestic work as “natural” to women. GRECMU’s members hoped to move beyond confining notions of femininity by redefining the casserole not as a symbol of subordination but as an emblem of liberation.

115 The group’s first office was opened in Mexico in 1975.

116 *La Tribuna/La Cacerola*, *Mujer y Coinciencia* (1988), 4. CEDINCI.
\end{flushright}
In order to achieve what they deemed “reflection” and cultivate “knowledge” in women’s groups, the transnational collaboration called for exercises such as analyzing the current reality of Uruguayan women and imagining an ideal future. Other exercises included “La Caja de Pandora” or Pandora’s Box where women identified obstacles and problems for Uruguayan women, wrote them down and placed them in a box. The manual instructed participants to find common themes in the box and discuss their merit and possible solutions. Many of the activities involved using art supplies for creative projects and group work in order to foster discussion and raise consciousness in communities of women. The results of the activities in practice within Uruguayan feminist groups proved diverse. Some women demanded more time for projects and called for more profundity and longer discussions. Overall, however, Uruguayan feminists found the exercises enriching to their repertoire of activist techniques. This exchange demonstrates another instance of connections between activists in Uruguay and lesser known feminist groups in the United States.

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Before 1973, few human rights organizations focused on Uruguay’s declining democracy. However, after the official dissolution of rights guaranteed by the Uruguayan constitution and the illegal imprisonment of thousands of dissidents, international groups focused their attention on the situation of human rights in Uruguay. Due to gross human rights violations in the country, many groups such as the US based CSUP and the Toronto based CDHRU specifically challenged the Uruguayan government’s treatment of prisoners. These campaigns utilized letter writing and petitions in order to show their disapproval of the situation in Uruguay and initially garnered the attention of the dictatorship. For example, a letter from CDHRU member Kenneth Golby protesting the treatment of Uruguayan prisoners received a response from President Bordaberry. Bordaberry’s widely published response inspired activists in Uruguay such as Zelmar Michelini to reach out to North Americans in order to inform them of what they felt was the real situation of political prisoners in their country. Through these reciprocal connections, North American human rights groups listened to the concerns of Uruguayan activists.

117 La Tribuna/La Cacerola, Mujer y Coinciencia, 16-17.
118 La Tribuna/La Cacerola, Mujer y Coinciencia, 43.
Other North American activists focused on leftist solidarity with Uruguays. Leftist solidarity publications included the voices of various groups in order to move beyond what they saw as arbitrary national borders formed by imperialist powers. In doing so, these groups consciously created transnational campaigns for Uruguay’s freedom. Many leftist groups also contained large numbers of Uruguayan exiles who hoped to forge ties with North Americans in order to bring international attention to the situation in their country. Leftist solidarity groups also utilized creative comparisons in their denunciations and linked the Uruguayan dictatorship with US imperialism and racist South Africa. These relationships supposedly demonstrated the corruption of the Uruguayan dictatorship. However, these groups rarely included the specific voices of women or looked at gendered experiences in prison. If reports from the left actually included any information about female prisoners they often relied on traditional ideas of women as wives and mothers.

Another leftist solidarity group, the anti-imperialist feminist WIRE established connections with the family of one Tupamara prisoner, Yessie Macchi. When writing to WIRE, Macchi’s family used creative materials in order to inspire members’ activism and solidarity. As a Tupamara, however, international solidarity groups did not prioritize Macchi’s situation as much as they did that of her male counterparts. Beyond her gendered experiences with international solidarity movements, Yessie’s treatment in the Tupamaros was markedly different because of her gender. Despite rhetoric claiming otherwise, the role of women in the Tupamaros often proved contradictory. The next chapter explores the rhetoric of equality within the Tupamaros and the quotidian realities for female militants within the group.
CHAPTER FIVE

“A PISTOL IN HER HAND”: SEXUAL LIBERATION, REPRODUCTION AND HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE TUPAMAROS AND THE GREATER URUGUAYAN LEFT

“Never has a woman been more equal to a man than when she is standing with a pistol in her hand” - Popular Tupamaro Slogan

Introduction

While organizations in the US offered transnational solidarity to Uruguayans in many ways, they typically discounted issues pertaining to gender and feminism. Similarly, during the 1960s and 70s most of the Uruguayan left ignored or disparaged women’s liberation as the concern of the so-called bourgeois middle class. When Uruguayan women did participate politically, the majority of the left presented their activism as pacifist and innately tied to their husbands and children. In contrast to the majority of the left in Uruguay, the Tupamaros offered a place for politicized women as individuals and

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1 My translation. The original reads, “Une femme n’est aussi egale a un homme que lorsqu’elle a un P 45 en main.” Araújo, Tupamaros, 146. Araújo’s edited transcription of interviews is the only source uncovered that features several Tupamaras speaking specifically about feminism and gender issues. While there are obvious weaknesses and limitations to this source, I corroborate much of the information with other sources.

2 In this instance I use Nancy Cott’s broad and classic definition of feminism which utilizes three criteria: a belief in sexual equality, a belief that women’s roles are socially constructed and the support for women as a distinct social grouping. See Nancy Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 4-5.

3 See for example “La Montevideana ante los cambios sociales.” Marcha, July 10, 1970. BNU. By the 1980s, feminism showed diversity in adherents and ideology and moved away from so-called western feminism. These activists used the terms “Third World feminism” and “black feminism” in order to describe new aspects in feminist thought. Though “Third World feminism” has often been critiqued for its implicit reinforcement of the supposed supremacy of the West, in her book Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1983), 119-123, feminist Cherríe Moraga defined Third World feminism as a global feminism that understands the racialized and sexualized “simultaneity of oppression.” Black feminism and its critique of white, western feminism also influenced the creation of a Third World Feminist movement. See also Chila Bulbeck, One World Women’s Movement (London: Pluto Press, 1988). For more see Chela Sandoval, Methodology of the Oppressed (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Chandra Mohanty, Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992); Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, eds., This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981); and Gloria Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating, eds., This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation (New York: Routledge, 2002).
even a program for their participation. Indeed, the Tupamaros contained a relatively high number of women combatants who took part in armed robberies and other missions that required them to handle and use weapons. By 1972, due in large part to a political program that consciously recruited women, the organization reportedly contained more than 25% female members.

On the surface, the Tupamaros supported equality between men and women in both ideology and everyday relations. Descriptions of women’s place in the Tupamaros critiqued the very notion of differences in the “revolutionary roles” of men and women. Thus, in their rhetoric, the Tupamaros contended that female militants held so much sway that the group could not properly function without the contributions of women. Admirers of the Tupamaros reinforced the notion that the group supported women’s equality. In 1970, Tupamaro sympathizer and author Alain Labrousse argued that Tupamaras acted as armed commanders and sometimes led cells. Most importantly, female militants in the MLN-T never inhabited solely supporting roles. Therefore, the Tupamaros allegedly offered women a place for militancy without prejudice.

The MLN-T contended that one of the most important obstacles to the revolution did not come from the ruling class, but rather women not utilizing their full revolutionary potential. Part of the practice of the Tupamaros’ revolutionary rhetoric included sharing all tasks equally without a gendered division of labor. Therefore, the group claimed never to give assignments based on gender and encouraged women to fulfill combatant roles. Unlike some leftist groups in Latin America, the MLN-T never romanticized motherhood or women’s domestic life. Instead, the Tupamaros believed that as

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7 Wilson, The Tupamaros, 85.
8 Labrousse, The Tupamaros, 43.
9 MLN-T, Los Tupamaros, 57.
10 Wilson, The Tupamaros, 85.
11 Wilson, The Tupamaros, 85.
12 The MLN-T’s critique of feminine drudgery in the home and of mothers deviated from other groups in Latin America such as the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo ( Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo) in Argentina and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua who touted women’s “natural” instincts as mothers in order to inspire their political participation. For more on issues of motherhood and activism in Latin America see Marguerite Guzman Bovard, Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1994); Ulises Gorini, La rebelión de las madres: historia de
long as society forced women to perform domestic duties women would never achieve autonomy. Women needed liberation from domesticity, which only occurred through the demolition of the gendered division of labor. Departing from the notion that motherhood inspired Latin American women’s activism, the so-called theoretical brain of the Tupamaros, Abraham Guillén, deemed the life of a mother, “petty, tedious and sterile.”

Beyond ending the gender division of domestic labor, the Tupamaros also stressed the equality of the revolutionary contributions made by women and men. Therefore, notions of gender parity proved significant in the revolutionary rhetoric of the Tupamaros. Some scholars have even suggested that the Tupamaros represented one of the few leftist guerrilla organizations during the early 1970s to develop a detailed ideology concerning revolutionary women. Stressing the importance of women’s role and advocating their revolutionary equality departed from common ideas of the time about the proper role of politically active Uruguayan women. For example, an article published in Marcha about activist women in Uruguay asserted that until they organized out of economic necessity in 1970, women preferred to live in a “small world” of domestic chores and rearing children. Thus, according to the article, scarcity and need, not political consciousness, inspired the women of Uruguay to abandon their perpetual state of “limbo.” In contrast, within the MLN-T, young women organized for their own interests and for the liberation of Uruguay, not because of their maternal instincts or necessity.

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13 Wilson, The Tupamaros, 86.

14 Guillén, Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla, 71.

15 Wilson, The Tupamaros, 86.

16 Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, “Guerrilleras in Latin America: Domestic and International Roles,” Journal of Peace Research, 43, no. 3 (May 2006): 318-319. See also Jane S. Jaquette, “Women in Revolutionary Movements in Latin America,” Journal of Marriage and the Family, 35 (May 1973): 351 and Linda Reif, “Women in Latin American Guerrilla Movements,” Comparative Politics, 18, no. 2 (January 1986): 147-169. Considering that in 1966 women comprised only 10% of the group, the rhetoric of equality likely encouraged women to join the organization. The considerable change in the number of female combatants also demonstrates willingness on the part of Tupamaro members to recruit women and make their participation a significant part of their movement.

17 Marcha, July 10, 1970, 11. BNU.


19 Wilson, The Tupamaros, 85.
Therefore, the Tupamaros undeniably opened a political space for Uruguayan women and deviated from traditional constructions of women as passive, maternal and non-violent. This contrasted with the greater part of the Uruguayan left who usually clung to ideas of motherhood and pacifism. However, despite their rejection of traditional constructions of femininity, the Tupamaros also at times denied women the opportunity to define their own roles in the organization. Group members’ rigid views on maternity and romantic relationships (both seen as distractions from the cause), perhaps unwittingly marginalized female combatants.

Whether in clandestine revolutionary cells or in prison, issues of sexuality also had an enormous impact on the treatment of female members of the Tupamaros. These conflicting constructions and expectations created a complex gendered world for the Tupamara to navigate with both her comrades and Uruguayan prison officials. While by no means radical, the Tupamaros proved to be more sexually liberated than mainstream Uruguayan society, which supported expressions of sexuality only inside of marriage for women. Sexual mores in the MLN-T supported heterosexual sex before marriage but primarily within monogamous relationships. Despite containing some slightly more liberated views about sexuality, the MLN-T often ignored or marginalized aspects of women’s sexuality, specifically concerning reproduction. Many Tupamaro members argued that pregnancy ruined female combatants’ chances of achieving true revolutionary status.

The specific sexual marginalization of women culminated in popular stereotypes about Tupamaras within the MLN-T and more broadly in the Uruguayan left. These stereotypes focused on

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21 Araújo, Tupamaras, 223.

22 Araújo, Tupamaras, 224.

23 Araújo, Tupamaras, 224. Such stringent restrictions against motherhood inevitably inspired a demographic difference in the composition of the membership of the Tupamaros. A study performed by the human rights organization SERPAJ demonstrates that at the time of their arrest, 62% of militant men were married compared with only 29% of women. Furthermore, the occupation of “housewife” comprised only 2% of politically active incarcerated women. Other occupations for female militants included professional (the highest at 35%), administrator (24%), full time activist (13%) and student (12%). When compared to their male counterparts, double the number of militant women listed their occupation as “professional” at the time of their arrest. Furthermore, at the time of their arrest, more women lived alone than men. 32% of male revolutionaries lived as part of a couple with children, three times more than females. Due to the fact that more men lived with their partners, a greater number of women lived in political groupings of activists than men. Furthermore, 73% of incarcerated female militants reported to have no children as compared with 51% of men. See SERPAJ, Uruguay: Nunca Más, 327-334.
sexuality and provided politically active women with two characterizations—that of promiscuous provocateur or asexual butch.24 Both choices limited the full participation of female combatants and reinforced sexual stereotypes. In addition, once in prison, pregnant Tupamaras experienced serious punishment for what the Uruguayan state perceived as their liberated sexuality and deviance from socially constructed gender norms. In turn, men also experienced feminization as a form of punishment from guards and state officials. This gendered torment proved to be one of the most humiliating ways to torture a male prisoner as it threatened his masculinity and honor.25

Beyond the gendered nature of torture in prison, the Uruguayan left presented prison as a dangerous place that fostered homosexual predators. For many in the Uruguayan left, the presence of homosexuals in prison represented another aspect of the corrupt Uruguayan government’s unfair detainment of political prisoners.26 The left’s overall disdainful perception of homosexuality paralleled the views of greater Uruguayan society. Despite some later support for homosexual rights, in the 1960s and 70s, most members of the Uruguayan left followed the Cuban Communist Party line that same sex desire represented a bourgeois deviance.27 While during the 1960s and 70s the Tupamaros overall discounted the contributions of homosexuals to the revolution, the role of women in the MLN-T and the greater Uruguayan left proved to be much more nuanced.

**Women’s Role in the Greater Uruguayan Left**

During the 1960s and 70s, most politically active Uruguayan women focused on denouncing the treatment of political prisoners and the deteriorating economic conditions of the country. At a 1979 international conference about women in exile one Uruguayan feminist argued, “We cannot say there exists [in our country] a widespread movement for women’s liberation, fighting against specific conditions of oppression which women live.”28 Indeed, Uruguayan women’s organizations of the time, such as the Movimiento Nacional Femenino por la Justicia y La Paz (The National Feminine Movement

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24 See for example “La Montevideana ante los cambios sociales,” *Marcha*, July 10, 1970. BNU.


26 See for example “Cárceles: Más Allá de los Muros,” *Marcha*, July 2, 1971. BNU.


for Justice and Peace) focused on humanitarian issues and not directly on feminism.\textsuperscript{29} The Movimiento Femenino found inspiration to organize after the police murder of Universidad de la República student Liber Arce in 1968.\textsuperscript{30} The Movimiento Femenino claimed to integrate all classes of women, housewives and workers as well as various political parties and religions. Most members of the movement, however, came from middle class backgrounds and were middle aged.\textsuperscript{31}

The Movimiento Femenino’s first public act was a sit-in which they claimed was influenced by the US civil rights movement.\textsuperscript{32} The leader of the organization, Lil Gonella de Chouy Terra, commented on how seeing a group of women protesting, the majority of them housewives, initially confounded Uruguayan police. The state did not know how to punish the subversion of the women of the Movimiento Femenino. As housewives and mothers, group members defied any stereotypes that the Uruguayan government associated with radical activism.\textsuperscript{33} Completely pacifist in their mechanisms of protest, members of the Movimiento Femenino advocated for matters of traditional feminine importance. Indeed, group leader Chouy Terra described politicized women in a somewhat essentialist manner. She claimed that women needed emotional inspiration to motivate their activism, such as the defense of their husband and children.\textsuperscript{34}

A celebration of International Women’s Day in 1972 demonstrates the variant paths leftist Uruguayan women pursued concerning political activism.\textsuperscript{35} Descriptions in Marcha of International Women’s Day stressed that the celebration supported peace and the struggle against fascism. The organizer of the event, Chouy Terra, contended that the protest called for peace, economic justice,

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Marcha}, April 16, 1971, 5. BNU.

\textsuperscript{30} “La Montevideana ante los Cambios Sociales,” \textit{Marcha}, July 10, 1970. BNU. After his death, the Uruguayan left made Arce into a symbol of the struggle against the ever worsening dictatorship.

\textsuperscript{31} “La Montevideana ante los Cambios Sociales,” 22.

\textsuperscript{32} “La Montevideana ante los Cambios Sociales,” 22.

\textsuperscript{33} The Uruguayan government’s perception of the Movimiento Femenino proved to be similar to the Argentine government’s notions about the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo as both had difficulty determining how to respond to the protests of female activists. Like the Movimiento Femenino, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo were mostly middle aged housewives who denounced military values of obedience and hierarchy and instead advocated pacifism and cooperation. See Guzman Bovard, \textit{Revolutionizing Motherhood}, 1.

\textsuperscript{34} “La Montevideana ante los Cambios Sociales,” 22.

\textsuperscript{35} “Marcha del la Mujer Uruguaya,” \textit{Marcha}, May 25, 1972. BNU.
liberty of expression and the defense of national sovereignty. Along with the struggle against fascism, those participating in the International Women’s Day celebration also hoped to consolidate the activism of female workers. Although the plans for the protest called for an alliance of women workers throughout the country, the celebration ignored mentioning specific gender issues.

When asked by Marcha reporters why the event had to consist only of women, organizer Chouy Terra argued that the problems within Uruguay affected all citizens, but women experienced such issues more severely. Marchers protested specifically against scarcity and militarization, problems which led to increased violence against women. While the organizer implied women’s supposedly natural attraction to pacifism, she also argued that society constructed Uruguayan women, like their counterparts throughout the world, to passively accept their situations and be confined to the home. Chouy Terra’s focus on pacifism versus passivism echoed the argument of some feminists who distinguished between traditionally feminine traits such as passivism which implies inactive suffering, and instead opted for pacifism, defined as peace making or agreement making. To these activists, pacifism did not mean tacit acceptance, but rather resistance that refused to use the tool of the oppressor: violence. While Chouy Terra critiqued the notion that women “naturally” belonged in the home, she and other organizers insisted upon the politics of compromise and argued against creating political divisions between men and women. Therefore, the Movimiento Femenino struggled not to appear too radical or demanding. Examples of signs from the march consisted of requests such as, “For the Peace of the Country,” “National Sovereignty,” and “End the Scarcity.” Despite the group’s desire to avoid any confrontation with the greater left or the police, the very public tactics of the Movimiento Femenino deviated from previous mechanisms of “correct” female political participation in Uruguay.

38 “Llamado a las Mujeres,” Marcha, March 10, 1971. BNU.
42 “Protesta Femenina,” Marcha, June 2, 1972. BNU.
Proving the complexity of issues of gender in the Uruguayan left, women within autonomous political parties often focused their activism on the importance of women’s roles as wives and mothers. For example, in a statement concerning their activism, El Comité Nacional Femenino del Frente Izquierda (National Feminine Committee of the Leftist Front) focused on exposing human rights violations in the country, expressing solidarity with the families of political prisoners and the fight against imperialism. Thus, the National Feminine Committee focused less of their attention on specific women’s issues and more on the nation as a whole. Similarly, the Congreso Nacional Femenino del Partido Demócrata Cristiano or the National Feminine Congress of the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), attempted to inspire women’s participation without speaking directly to them as autonomous political actors. To encourage women’s activism, the group appealed to the future of Uruguay’s children. They reminded women of the impoverished elderly population as well as the need for the education of all classes and sufficient medical assistance for every citizen.

According to the feminine branch of the PDC, these issues mattered most to women as they naturally supported the common good for every citizen in Uruguayan society, especially the downtrodden.

Like other political parties of the Uruguayan left, the Frente Amplio also presented gender politics in an overall traditional manner. For example, Frente Amplio sponsored pamphlets encouraging women to vote in the 1971 elections assumed that all women voted based on the interests of their family and children. Even a childless woman had some ties to motherhood and domesticity as she too followed her allegedly inherent feminine interests. The party reinforced this idea by featuring pictures of smiling women of all ages holding and caressing babies in their pamphlets. According to the Frente, women’s suffering should inspire them to join the struggle and support their brothers and/or spouses. Thus, the Frente tied women’s political participation with that of their male relatives. Not competent enough to vote for their own interests, the Frente assumed women would vote on behalf of children, brothers or husbands.

43 “Del Comité Femenino Del Frente Izquierda,” Marcha, January 7, 1972. BNU.
44 “No Entregarnos al Extranjero,” Marcha, December 19, 1969. BNU.
46 Frente Amplio, “Mujer Uruguaya.”
47 Frente Amplio, “Mujer Uruguaya.”
Other pamphlets designed to court women’s votes centered on health care, education, and improving the lives of children. The 1971 Frente presidential candidate Liber Seregni promised women voters public clinics specifically designed to help mothers and infants, medical assistance to rural areas, cheaper medicines and guaranteed education for all Uruguayan children. The Frente also hoped to appeal to women by pledging to build more schools and create sports facilities for children.\(^{48}\) Once again, the campaign assumed that all women’s political aspirations derived from a desire to improve the lives of children. Thus, almost all of the issues on which the Frente focused harkened to a supposed ethic of caring in Uruguayan women.\(^{49}\)

The marketing campaign of the Frente’s platform for women rarely focused on economic issues. When the group spoke to women about economics, instead of analyzing structural problems, they blamed Uruguay’s economic difficulties not only on unemployment but the disintegration of the family.\(^{50}\) The Frente’s solution for combating the disintegration of the Uruguayan family ambiguously focused on creating conditions that helped to reunite the family unit.\(^{51}\) It is unclear what these specific conditions were, but the Frente obviously thought this promise held great appeal to women. In fact, the Frente argued to women voters that their ultimate goal was the happiness of the family.\(^{52}\)

When trying to recruit male voters, the party took an entirely different track. It did not look to the family, but to larger issues of economic justice and opposition to the increasingly repressive state.\(^{53}\) Indeed, in other general Frente declarations, the concerns of the family and children prove non-existent. To the larger “masculine” left, the Frente combated repression and the illegal imprisonment of


\(^{49}\) The debates within feminism concerning violence and gender constructions are significant and have continued in many strands since the 1960s and 70s. In the 1980s, in her study In a Different Voice Carol Gilligan claims that women speak a different, more “caring” moral language than men who speak the language of “justice.” This assertion has political implications, as does Sara Ruddick’s notion of maternal thinking. In her work “Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace,” Ruddick claims that those who engage in maternal thinking (primarily women) view war and violence as destroying a unique human life that cannot be replaced. Non-maternal thinking, usually done by men, leads to social injustice, environmental disaster and war. See Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982) and Sara Ruddick, Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

\(^{50}\) Frente Amplio, “Analicemos Juntas.”

\(^{51}\) Frente Amplio, “Analicemos Juntas.”

\(^{52}\) Frente Amplio, “Analicemos Juntas.”

\(^{53}\) “Frente Amplio,” Cuadernos de Marcha, no. 46 (February 1971): 21. CEDINCI.
dissenters, fought for an end to poverty through social welfare and appealed to workers and students.\textsuperscript{54} In their general politics, the Frente brought attention to changing the economic structures of Uruguay and developing what they deemed an anti-imperialist country.\textsuperscript{55} These issues obviously mattered to Uruguayan women as many joined the Tupamaros, a group that never ascribed importance to children and families.

Despite an overall traditional marketing campaign, the Frente’s appeal to female voters also contained priorities concerning women’s rights. Firstly, the campaign lamented that thousands of students of both sexes lacked education. By doing so, the party acknowledged the importance of education for women. Even more unexpected, however, was the organization’s inclusion of a vaguely feminist proposal to inspire women voters.\textsuperscript{56} The Frente claimed that under Seregni’s government women would be integrated into the community and liberated from the drudgery of daily domestic work. Unlike their other, more ambiguous campaign promises, the Frente put forth a solution to help ease women’s domestic drudgeries. They argued for the creation of public laundries and government sponsored services to cut down on the large amount of housework for women.\textsuperscript{57}

Featuring these promises in the Frente’s 1971 campaign demonstrates the pervasiveness of feminist politics within the Uruguayan left. Even though some, such as writer Carina Perelli, have argued against the existence of any feminist consciousness in Uruguay in the 1970s, the inclusion of such campaign promises demonstrates at the very least an awareness of feminist issues.\textsuperscript{58} The critique of women’s domestic drudgery reflected what the Tupamaros argued about constructed feminine roles. However, the Frente blended traditional ideas of maternity and a feminine ethic of caring with a promise to help ease women’s domestic chores and integrate women into society. Unlike the Tupamaros, the Frente acknowledged political women’s roles as wives and mothers. This tactic proved somewhat

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{54} “Frente Amplio,” 21.
  \item \textsuperscript{55} “Frente Amplio,” 21.
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Frente Amplio, “Analicemos Juntas.”
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Frente Amplio, “Analicemos Juntas.”
\end{itemize}
successful in inspiring female participation as the Frente eventually garnered enough support to inspire the march of 100,000 Uruguayan women in 1980.59

Due to the focus on motherhood in leftist Uruguayan politics, in an essay about women’s activism, Carina Perelli argued that Uruguayan women’s political activism lacked even the consciousness of “being resistant.”60 In reference to political women’s role in Uruguay Perelli argues, “Women in general did not resist because they wanted to change the society they knew, with all its gender and class inequalities; on the contrary, they wanted to restore the good old Uruguay which they had been comfortable.”61 While Perelli posits that politically active women in Uruguay had little consciousness, in actuality, large groups of women fervently denounced injustice in ways much more public than they had in the past. Beginning in the 1960s, leftist women’s participation proved multifaceted as they forged different political paths. Many Uruguayan women’s public activities also influenced later movements that deemed themselves feminist. Therefore, only rigid definitions of liberation and feminism exclude Uruguayan women as so-called conscious political actors. Indeed, historian Karen Offen has argued for two distinct but sometimes overlapping trends in feminist thought and practice—“relational” and “individualistic” feminism. While individualistic feminism (more prominent in the United States) focuses less on the community and emphasizes the similarities between men and women, relational or maternal feminism (popular in Latin America) highlights women’s differences from men, particularly their role as mothers.62

Besides activist women who espoused pacifism and women within leftist parties, female militants in the MLN-T exhibited radical political ideologies and actions in comparison to the traditional gender constructions of Uruguayan society. Therefore, Perelli’s narrow assumptions about women’s supposedly limited political role in the left during the 1960s and 70s also ignore the Tupamaras, who consistently challenged common constructions of femininity in Uruguayan society. Indeed, even Perelli admitted that she and other Uruguayan girls conceptualized the Tupamaras as a new role model for the


60 Perelli, “Putting Conservatism to Good Use,” 109.


younger generation. Perelli recalls the excitement of growing up in Uruguay at the height of Tupamaro
popularity:

[I remember] the mute admiration many of us felt for those mythical older sisters who braved
bullets to bring about a new order. They incarnated a new way of being a woman, not bound by
the limits of a household with a husband, children, family obligations, or by the routine of
schooling, a job and bills. They seemed so free to us, we who were searching, probing, adjusting,
in a milieu that had become so stagnant as to asphyxiate us.\textsuperscript{63}

Thus, the Tupamaras deviated most from the norms of the left and greater Uruguayan society, which
usually focused on women’s roles as wives and mothers. Women joined the Tupamaros not because of
familial obligations, but for the same reasons as men; to fight against the disintegration of freedom in
Uruguay.\textsuperscript{64} The Tupamara became such a mythical symbol that internationally renowned Uruguayan
folk singer and activist Daniel Viglietti wrote a song about them entitled “Muchacha.”\textsuperscript{65} In “Muchacha”
or “Girl” Viglietti sang of a young woman guerrilla fighter. When the Uruguayan government outlawed
the word “Tupamaro,” numerous words replaced it, including “muchacha.”\textsuperscript{66} The “muchacha”
represented the female counterpart to Che’s “New Man.” In his song, Viglietti referred to the
revolutionary Tupamara as a “complete woman,” “compañera” and “guerrilla fighter.”\textsuperscript{67} Besides
Viglietti’s reference to the guerrilla fighter’s hair, he ignores the Tupamara’s appearance and chooses to
focus on her revolutionary attributes. He applauds her bravery and “completeness” as a woman.
Therefore, in Viglietti’s song, a real woman is a revolutionary fighter, not solely a maternal being. While
Viglietti did not sing much about women specifically, when he sang about the Tupamaras he used the
same reverent characterization that he did for male guerrilla fighters.\textsuperscript{68}

Therefore, while by no means completely equal in their treatment of women, the Tupamaros
offered a different kind of political option for women that did not exist in most of the greater Uruguayan

\textsuperscript{63} Perelli, “Putting Conservatism to Good Use,” 99.

\textsuperscript{64} Araújo, Tupamaras, 213-14.

\textsuperscript{65} The Uruguayan government imprisoned Viglietti in 1972, but released the singer a few months later, in part because of an
international campaign to free him. Viglietti had many well known supporters who signed petitions for his freedom including

\textsuperscript{66} Araújo, Tupamaras, 149

\textsuperscript{67} Center for Cuban Studies, “Daniel Viglietti.”

\textsuperscript{68} Center for Cuban Studies, “Daniel Viglietti.”
left. Even those from countries with supposedly more liberal gender constructions conceptualized the Tupamaros’ treatment of women as unique. The radical and at times contradictory political role for militant women proved to be so intriguing that prisoners of the Tupamaros, such as captive Geoffrey Jackson, wrote extensively about female MLN-T members with interest and sometimes disdain.

**Geoffrey Jackson and the Tupamaras**

While many in the left viewed the Tupamaros as an exemplary revolutionary organization that supported egalitarian gender roles, other sources emerged during the 1970s that demonstrated a much more complicated picture of the group. In his 1973 autobiographical account, *Surviving the Long Night*, former British Ambassador and onetime Tupamaro prisoner Geoffrey Jackson offers details about the MLN-T’s attitude towards women’s liberation and the group’s quotidian gender constructions. Unwittingly, through his chauvinistic descriptions and fascination with various Tupamaras, Jackson offers a gendered account of the Tupamaros that when read against the grain provides valuable insight into the group’s gender structures. Though not meant to be an account about gender, Jackson repeatedly expressed an almost obsessive interest in the role of female combatants in the Tupamaros.

While held in the Tupamaro’s People’s Prison for nearly 250 days, Jackson observed the complex relations between male and female Tupamaros. Jackson’s descriptions of his experiences obviously contain biases, political and other types, yet they offer a lens into the nature of gender relations in the Tupamaros beyond the rhetoric they espoused. Above all, Jackson’s account reveals the contradictions that occurred within the group concerning gender, something corroborated later by interviews with Tupamaras. Indeed, Jackson’s account demonstrates that the group strove for gender equality but also marginalized women in their day to day interactions and ultimately supported a militaristic, masculine ideology concerning violence and interpersonal relationships.

An interesting example of gender relations within the Tupamaros comes from Jackson’s description of the eventual reassignment of a female guard. While imprisoned for nearly a year, both

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69 See Jackson, *Surviving the Long Night*.

70 See for example, Jackson, *Surviving the Long Night*, Part Four: Mind, Men and Women.

71 See Araújo, *Tupamaros*.

male and female Tupamaros guarded Jackson twenty-four hours a day. Jackson had a variety of interactions with female guards during this imprisonment. Like their male counterparts, some were tough (to Jackson’s horror) and some showed him kindness (which he in turn perceived in a gendered manner). Unlike their female counterparts, Tupamaro men who displayed kindness did not receive an indictment of innate femininity from Jackson. According to Jackson, some female guards were self-conscious about their status as militants and compensated by being overly aggressive towards Jackson and sometimes other Tupamaros. However, Jackson’s own notions about proper feminine behavior obviously influenced the ambassador to judge the women harshly. Most of the Tupamara guards behaved similarly to their male counterparts—some showed Jackson kindness or indifference and a few treated him cruelly.

Most of Jackson’s female guards displayed what he described as modesty, but to his horror one particular guard frequently spoke obscenities with her male cohorts. According to Jackson, the guard was also completely unselfconscious as she urinated in front of Jackson and her male comrades. While the female guard merely used the same facilities as the male Tupamaros, Jackson viewed her actions as overtly sexual and reportedly “lost his temper” over this allegedly unfeminine guard. The prisoner lodged a formal complaint with his captors and the group subsequently replaced the Tupamara with a man. While the Tupamara merely used the same facilities as her male comrades and cursed with as much intensity as they did, the Tupamaros acquiesced to Jackson’s complaint about her conduct. Perhaps the Tupamaros hoped to avoid friction with the prisoner, or the reassignment of the female guard could indicate that the group expected Tupamaras not to mimic all stereotypically masculine traits such as bawdiness, rowdy behavior and cursing.

Besides his issues with the rowdy female guard, Jackson observed the gender division of labor in the People’s Prison. While popular rhetoric ignored the idea of a gender division of labor within the revolutionary group, the quotidian realities of Tupamaro guards often reified traditional gender roles.

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76 Jackson, *Surviving the Long Night*, 76.

77 Jackson, *Surviving the Long Night*, 76.

78 Jackson, *Surviving the Long Night*, 77.
Women sewed clothes and other items when needed and usually prepared Jackson’s meals. Jackson also contended that the one outstanding moment where women’s liberation was acknowledged by MLN-T members occurred after the prisoner jokingly drew a picture of a beauty contest for Miss Comrade. In Jackson’s picture, female militants donned bikinis and the aforementioned Ku Klux Klan jailer hoods. In response, one Tupamara dismissed beauty competitions as meat markets and humiliating for both women and the Tupamaros. One male captor, purportedly “addicted” to women’s liberation, contended that women and men only achieved true equality when they each held a .45 pistol. Indeed, according to Jackson, the principal time that the Tupamaros embodied their rhetoric of equality occurred when women and men assembled and used weapons together. Jackson noted with shock that young women adeptly assembled and disassembled weapons with the same precision as their male counterparts. Therefore, according to Jackson and some Tupamaro members, only when Tupamaras “took up the gun” could they achieve equality.

Jackson’s account reveals that in most ways the MLN-T successfully integrated women into the organization. Tupamara cell leaders gave several different female militants the responsibility of guarding Jackson and taught both women and men how to handle weapons. Therefore, from Jackson’s account it seems that less overt instances of gender inequality proved more common in the Tupamaros, such as the sexual division of labor and perhaps the reassignment of the “unfeminine” guard. Jackson’s examples offer insight into the contradictory treatment of women within the group. Tellingly, many of his observations reflect what some Tupamaras later critiqued about their experiences in the MLN-T.

The Role of Women in the Tupamaros

Although chauvinistic in his descriptions about the role of women in the Tupamaros, Jackson’s contention about the less than equal treatment of female militants has been corroborated by testimonies from some Tupamaras. While the organization opened new spaces for women, it often disallowed

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80 Jackson, *Surviving the Long Night*, 141.
81 Jackson, *Surviving the Long Night*, 141.
82 Jackson, *Surviving the Long Night*, 78.
83 Jackson, *Surviving the Long Night*, 77.
women to speak for themselves about their place in the revolution.\textsuperscript{84} The ignorance of women’s marginalization partially derived from the fact that Tupamaro members thought of Uruguay as a nation more intellectually and socially aligned with Europe than other countries in Latin America.\textsuperscript{85} Citing the history of Uruguayan democracy, MLN-T members argued that Uruguayan women already occupied an advanced place in society, more so than other women in South America. Due to these nationalistic ideas, the Tupamaros presented Uruguay as the most politically, culturally and ideologically advanced country in Latin America.\textsuperscript{86} Once again, notions about Uruguay’s exceptional nature influenced political discourse, this time concerning the allegedly superior role of women in the country. When the Tupamaros mentioned women’s subjugation only rarely did they acknowledge that the oppression of women came from more than the reproduction of class domination within the home.\textsuperscript{87} Thus, in part because of their belief in Uruguayan exceptionalism, the Tupamaros failed to offer a comprehensive critique of women’s marginalization in cultural and social spheres.

According to former Tupamaras, the group devalued the realm of the feminine as they encouraged women to take on socially constructed masculine traits of aggression and emotional control in order to demonstrate true political validity.\textsuperscript{88} Indeed, the most prominent saying about gender within the MLN-T was, “Never has a woman been more equal to a man than when she is standing with a pistol in her hand.”\textsuperscript{89} Thus, women’s equality derived from an external element, in this case a pistol, and not from deserving acceptance or fighting for change. While some measure of equality prevailed in the alleged sameness of revolutionary contributions, the group also limited women by continuing to place restrictions on their self expression. The MLN-T avoided critiquing socially constructed traits of masculinity as these practices supported their pro-violence ideology and behavior. Therefore, criticisms of gender construction focused only on obliterating constructions of femininity and never masculinity.\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{84} Araújo, \textit{Tupamaras}, 125.

\textsuperscript{85} Araújo, \textit{Tupamaras}, 124.

\textsuperscript{86} Araújo, \textit{Tupamaras}, 124. See also \textit{Dialogue Before Death}, 17.

\textsuperscript{87} Araújo, \textit{Tupamaras}, 137.

\textsuperscript{88} Araújo, \textit{Tupamaras}, 245.

\textsuperscript{89} Araújo, \textit{Tupamaras}, 146.

\textsuperscript{90} Araújo, \textit{Tupamaras}, 146.
However, the revolutionary and masculine “New Man” also paradoxically appropriated traditionally feminine traits such as sacrifice, suffering and austere discipline.\(^91\)

In reference to the role of female militants, the Tupamaros argued that women made excellent service team members, which gave militants appointed logistical tasks.\(^92\) These jobs ranged from the photographer, who took photos for fake passports and identity cards, to medical professionals responsible for the health of combatants. Service actions also included finding meeting and hiding places, buying food and obtaining arms and other needed supplies.\(^93\) Besides populating service teams, most female members also received military instruction. The Tupamaros valued their female members as combatants in large part because they realized that women had the ability to obtain easier entrance into certain places.\(^94\) Therefore, according to the Tupamaros, women’s accessibility best demonstrated their propensity to be good soldiers.\(^95\) Due to the fact that mainstream Uruguayan society stereotyped women as innocuous and non-violent, Tupamaras infiltrated neighborhoods and secure buildings with ease.\(^96\) The allegedly innocent appearance of Tupamaras also allowed for the transmission of messages and objects such as weapons in purses and bags. Using disguises to make their appearance like that of everyday women, female militants easily tricked officials.\(^97\)

Thus, in the few instances that the MLN-T specifically described the importance of the Tupamaras, they usually focused on how Uruguayan stereotypes allowed female combatants more access to target areas than their male counterparts. While women did participate in violent actions, focusing on access discounted the other contributions of the Tupamaras and greatly reduced the possibility for leadership roles in the organization. According to the Tupamaros, women brought meticulous care to already existing plans, but rarely crafted strategy in the group. The MLN-T also purported to admire women’s patience and silence in the armed struggle.\(^98\) Though the group intended to

\(^{91}\) Rodríguez, Women, Guerrillas and Love, 50.

\(^{92}\) Arrarás, “Armed Struggle,” 92.

\(^{93}\) Arrarás, “Armed Struggle,” 92.

\(^{94}\) MLN-T, Los Tupamaros, 59.

\(^{95}\) MLN-T, Los Tupamaros, 59.

\(^{96}\) MLN-T, Los Tupamaros, 59.

\(^{97}\) MLN-T, Los Tupamaros, 58.

\(^{98}\) MLN-T, Los Tupamaros, 58-59.
compliment female militants, they inadvertently reinforced stereotypes of women as neat, patient and compromising. While technically female militants were equal to men in battle, the MLN-T failed to admire women’s combat or leadership skills, instead focusing on the more innocuous contributions of Tupamaras.

Some feminist critics have argued that the few women who received leadership roles in the MLN-T obtained them in large part because of their romantic linkages to male Tupamaros. Indeed, if a Tupamara had a boyfriend or husband within the operation, their relationship often overshadowed any individual identity of the Tupamara. For example, group members commonly referred to one Tupamara as “the companion of Manchin” (her boyfriend). When the Tupamara got pregnant she did not want to stop fighting as she firmly believed in the cause of the MLN-T. However, when her pregnancy became visible, her boyfriend told the cell leader, “You send her to me in services” (another unit). Acquiescing to the demands of Manchin, group leaders subsequently removed the Tupamara from the military sector without ever consulting her. The female combatant went through her pregnancy alone as her boyfriend performed many dangerous actions for the organization.

According to another Tupamara, pregnant militants ultimately underwent displacement from their cells and the group banned pregnant women from the military sector after their fourth month of pregnancy. The group also forbade certain tasks dealing with combat even months after a woman had given birth. Thus, within the Tupamaros, maternity represented a serious career obstacle for the female militant. Some Tupamaras reported feeling deep disappointment at being forced to stop their revolutionary activities once they had children. The notion of maternity as an impediment, however, changed when the pregnant woman involved turned out to be a Tupamaro’s wife or girlfriend. The MLN-T encouraged so-called average women to reproduce as every child symbolized another potential revolutionary. Thus, the group never questioned if fatherhood presented an obstacle to Tupamaro men

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99 Nita Samuniski, email message to the author, April 20, 2009.
100 Araújo, Tupamaras, 223.
101 Araújo, Tupamaras, 223.
102 Araújo, Tupamaras, 162; 200.
103 Araújo, Tupamaras, 223.
104 Araújo, Tupamaras, 163.
and their ability to serve their cells. Therefore, while the Tupamara broke down the traditional model of Uruguayan womanhood, some former members have argued that the group did not allow women to create any new set of values to replace it.

However, for others in the left, the MLN-T represented a group committed to egalitarian relations between male and female combatants. Furthermore, some Tupamaras argued that in comparison with other Uruguayan leftist movements, the MLN-T proved to be more committed to egalitarian relations between men and women. The Tupamaras who claimed to experience no sexism within the group also often maligned feminism. These Tupamaras characterized feminism as a revolt against domestic tasks that society imposed on women such as child rearing, cooking and housework. As independent, middle class professionals who considered themselves already “liberated,” these Tupamaras failed to see how feminism affected their lives. They also viewed the feminist movement as containing middle class “snobs,” who were unable to present a radical enough solution to the problem of women’s societal, political and economic marginalization. Perhaps strengthening the Tupamaras’ maligning of feminism, the leftist Uruguayan press presented the protests of women in Europe and North America as something foreign to Uruguayans and all of Latin America.

Some Tupamaras and politically active women in the Uruguayan left asserted the insignificance of feminism in the hierarchy of liberation movements. One Tupamara argued that while women should enjoy some level of freedom, the feminist movement could easily “get out of hand” and produce

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105 Araújo, Tupamaras, 163.
106 Labrousse, The Tupamaros, 43.
107 Araújo, Tupamaras, 197.
109 Araújo, Tupamaras, 169.
“deviations.” According to its Tupamaro critics, feminism ignored issues of class too readily and supported middle class ideals, which caused deviations in true revolutionary actions and ideology. Some Tupamaras also believed that their situation placed them beyond the problems of the so-called average woman. As full time militants and “exceptional” women, Tupamaras supposedly occupied a place removed from oppressed and exploited gender circumstances. This notion of superiority influenced particular Tupamaras to believe that they transcended what they saw as the trivial problems of the average middle class woman.

However, while Tupamaras rejected the label of feminism, most subverted gender norms as they refused to inhabit traditional feminine roles as defined by their society. Instead of adhering to traditional gender roles, Tupamaras strove to cultivate their studies and participate in political activism. Many Tupamaras reported that they hoped joining an armed struggle would save them from a life of cooking, cleaning and raising children. In reflection, some female members regretted what they deemed the hypocrisy of embracing their own personal liberation alongside their rejection of solidarity with other women. One Tupamara reported feeling “selfish” for her actions in the Tupamaros as she planned to free herself from the drudgery of motherhood and marriage but ignored the oppression of other women. Another Tupamara remembered the strong maternal influences of her childhood. The Tupamara felt that her upbringing inevitably influenced her to join the organization. Indeed, the Tupamaras’ mother often called into question her husband’s attitudes about the roles of men and women. This too, however, remained on a personal level and never translated into support of feminism for the militant. Thus, many Tupamaras rejected adhering to societal norms in their personal lives, but on a political level they did not prioritize the gendered transformation of society as a whole.

Other Tupamaras argued that feminist beliefs clashed with the rationale of the Tupamaros as the group advocated taking up arms and fighting to the death for the “fatherland.”

111 Araújo, Tupamaras, 201.
112 Araújo, Tupamaras, 201.
113 Araújo, Tupamaras, 212.
114 See for example Marcha, July 10, 1970, 11. BNU.
115 Araújo, Tupamaras, 177.
116 Araújo, Tupamaras, 187.
117 Araújo, Tupamaras, 177.
about the struggle to end the dictatorship in Uruguay, “Could the rest count?” Therefore, some Tupamaras harbored contemptuous ideas about feminism as it represented a secondary struggle and a distraction from the revolution. At the same time, female combatants joined the group in order to obtain personal liberation from traditional feminine roles. These complex beliefs and quotidian realities demonstrate the difficulty of stringently categorizing feminism as a monolithic movement. Therefore, while many Tupamaras did not categorize themselves as feminist until the 1980s, they defined their political role through non-traditional lifestyles and participation in violent combat.

**Stereotypes and Sexuality**

Despite the Tupamaras’ challenge to the notion of the passive and non-violent Uruguayan woman, the Tupamaros also harbored stereotypes about female militants. While the group usually presented these stereotypes in a humorous manner, they still limited women’s full participation and propensity to be taken seriously as militants. Stereotypes within the group concerning the Tupamara functioned in a dichotomy—that of the sexless, masculine female soldier and the promiscuous, beautiful combatant. The “drill sergeant” stereotype, an ugly and authoritarian woman, was usually represented as a person of African descent. This *Negra* (black woman) dressed terribly, often owned a motorcycle and was asexual. Ironically, the stereotype of the Negra proved to be one of the only times that the Tupamaros actually acknowledged the existence of racial diversity in their country. However, this negative representation differed greatly from the MLN-T’s portrayal of the Black Power movement in the US. While the group supported black male revolutionaries (particularly in the US) and applauded their militant use of violence, they also reinforced stereotypes of black female militants (within Uruguay). Within the Tupamaros, the female militant of African descent was not as romanticized as her male counterparts. This gendered racial stereotype demonstrates another layer of the Tupamaros’ complicated relationship with race. Indeed, the group ignored racial issues within their own country or

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118 Araújo, *Tupamaras*, 211-212.


120 Araújo, *Tupamaras*, 216.

121 For a fuller discussion of how the Tupamaros viewed the Black Power movement see Chapter Three.
supported stereotypes, all the while proclaiming their support of civil rights and black power movements in the United States.

The other side of the gendered stereotype of female militants derived from the James Bond image of political women as sexualized provocateurs. Within the popular myth of the group, this sly and gorgeous militant radiated such beauty that she distracted the police so guerrillas could commit their covert actions. This attractive woman, whose mythology came from James Bond films, was also sexually promiscuous and usually blonde. While denouncing some aspects of US culture and politics, male Tupamaros enjoyed US produced James Bond films so much that they appropriated the film’s representation of women. This particular cultural reference had an important influence on the group’s mythology concerning the role of female guerrillas. Indeed, members of the Tupamaros even admitted that they liked and admired James Bond films during an interrogation session with captive Dan Mitrione. In response to the influence of James Bond in the group, some Tupamaras argued that the stereotypes of the femme fatale supported bourgeois attributes of women but cleverly placed them in the context of serving the revolution. Within this representation, women remained sexual objects and reinforced the same stereotypes of the greater Uruguayan society, but at the service of an important cause.

Alongside the Tupamaros, the greater Uruguayan left also reinforced stereotypes about sexually ambiguous or promiscuous politically active women. An article in Marcha about the role of women in politics in Montevideo described female political activist Elsa Fernández and initially focuses on her masculine appearance. The writer deemed Fernández as not pretty but a “severe” beauty with a well

122 Araújo, Tupamaras, 216.

123 Araújo, Tupamaras, 216. The phenomenon of romanticizing the blonde revolutionary also occurred in Brazil after the release of the film Bonnie and Clyde. In 1968, in Brazil there emerged a plethora of sexualized images of militant women, particularly after a bank robbery which was linked to Carlos Marighella and a blonde woman named Silvia. See Langland, “Birth Control Pills and Molotov Cocktails,” 308-349. See also Hilary Neroni, The Violent Woman: Femininity, Violence and Narrative in Contemporary American Cinema (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

124 Araújo, Tupamaras, 216. For more on cultural influences of the US on Latin America during the Cold War see Jean Franco, The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

125 Dialogue Before Death, 9.

126 Araújo, Tupamaras, 217. For more on James Bond as a cultural and philosophical influence see James B. South and Jacob M. Held, eds., James Bond and Philosophy (Chicago: Open Court, 2006).

127 “La Montevideana ante los cambios sociales,” 11.
defined face, firm chin and short hair with sideburns. Marcha reported that Fernández also wore men’s clothing—a black jacket, black pants and red sweater.\textsuperscript{128} Therefore, the Marcha article focused on the female activist’s appearance and not her politics. The preoccupation with the appearance and sexuality of politically active women also occurred with the few women who achieved positions of power in the country such as Senator Alba Roballo. Many on the right and left conceptualized Roballo as simultaneously a “whore” and a masculine “lesbian.”\textsuperscript{129} In the 1960s, Roballo had served as a Minister of Culture in the Colorado Party before moving to the Frente Amplio in 1971. Nicknamed “La Negra,” Roballo was the first female minister in Latin America, but soon had her title removed by President Pacheco Areco in 1968. At various times Roballo represented both sides of the aforementioned “La Negra” stereotype—that of a lascivious sexual predator and then conversely, an asexual militant.\textsuperscript{130} Therefore, the Tupamaros and the greater Uruguayan left often limited women’s political participation by relying on simplistic and binary stereotypes about female activists.

Thus, some female members felt that the MLN-T offered them two options: to mimic the masculine image of the guerrilla for the politico-military fight or to play the role of sexualized provocateur used to distract the police.\textsuperscript{131} Most often, however, denouncing the feminine and taking on masculine traits proved to be the political choice offered to female militants. One Tupamara recalled of her role in the group, “You were required to adhere to masculine values, to de-feminize yourself in all areas, to repress traditional values but without anything more: without creating, without searching within yourself, your body or your emotions for new values.”\textsuperscript{132} Within such narrowly defined notions of proper

\textsuperscript{128} “La Montevideana ante los cambios sociales,” 11.

\textsuperscript{129} Araújo, Tupamaras, 212.

\textsuperscript{130} Araújo, Tupamaras, 212. For more on Alba Roballo see Guillermo Chifflet, Alba Roballo: Pregon por el tiempo Nuevo (Montevideo: Ediciones TAE, 1992). During the 1960s and 70s, Roballo represented one of the few women with some political power in Uruguay and spoke openly about the treatment of women in both the left and the right. She argued that Uruguayan men rarely recognized the value of their female counterparts and politically excluded them (Roballo experienced this first hand). Even in the General Assembly, colleagues referred to Roballo as “Señora” and not her title of senator. While Roballo acknowledged that women’s liberation and especially the Black Power movement had influenced the Uruguayan student left, she argued that the system of government excluded women and completely ignored people of color. Despite all of her outspokenness, Roballo continued to believe that women’s activism would only begin once their husbands, children and friends disappeared or faced incarceration. Unwittingly, Roballo also reinforced the stereotype of women only committing to politics in order to protect their families, particularly their children. See “La Montevideana ante los cambios sociales,” 11.

\textsuperscript{131} Araújo, Tupamaras, 196.

\textsuperscript{132} Araújo, Tupamaras, 217.
female militant behavior, the Tupamara had difficulties constructing her own role within the group. Indeed, literary scholar Saldaña-Portillo has contended that this type of “revolutionary universalism” absorbs all differences and in turn makes the promise of true equality impossible.\textsuperscript{133}

However, Tupamaros’ experiences as female militants contained instances of both subjugation and liberation. The reality of militant women was complex and never solely oppressive or emancipating. The complexity of gender constructions and the change in traditional roles for women also affected the realm of sexuality and pleasure. Indeed, the Tupamaros and the greater Uruguayan left hoped to support freer lifestyles concerning relations between men and women.\textsuperscript{134} Although the Tupamaros support of sex before marriage may have been somewhat more open-minded when compared with the greater Uruguayan society, their beliefs still remained nowhere near radical. Even political prisoner Geoffrey Jackson deemed the Tupamaros’ attitude towards sexuality as “prudish.”\textsuperscript{135} According to Jackson, his captors had informed him that sexual promiscuity, along with excessive drug and alcohol use only harmed the revolution.\textsuperscript{136} Thus, members of the MLN-T and the Uruguayan left primarily supported only heterosexual expressions of affection and usually in monogamous pairings. Many militants’ characterization of marriage as a confining institution reflected the ideas of turn of the century Uruguayan anarchists as much as 1960s countercultural ideas of “free love.”\textsuperscript{137} Uruguayan anarchists and the Tupamaros both argued for the importance of sexual expression outside of marriage, but primarily in the confines of heterosexual, serial monogamy.\textsuperscript{138} Therefore, for both the Tupamaros and turn of the century Uruguayan anarchists, in order to avoid a traditional and stifling marriage, women and men coupled because of shared attraction and love.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{133} Saldaña-Portillo, The Revolutionary Imagination, 78.

\textsuperscript{134} Araújo, Tupamaras, 224. See also, “Jóvenes: entre la violencia y la sociedad ideal,” Marcha, June 13, 1969. BNU.

\textsuperscript{135} Che also advocated for asceticism for revolutionaries. Ilena Rodríguez argues that Che’s guerrilla subject utilized, “The terminology of protestant personal repression.” See Rodríguez, Women, Guerrillas, and Love, 44.

\textsuperscript{136} Jackson, Surviving the Long Night, 169.

\textsuperscript{137} Ehrick, Shield of the Weak, 40.

\textsuperscript{138} Ehrick, Shield of the Weak, 40.

\textsuperscript{139} Ehrick, Shield of the Weak, 40. For more on sexual mores within the left during Southern Cone dictatorships see Langland, “Birth Control Pills and Molotov Cocktails,” 308-349.
During the 1960s and early 70s some in the Uruguayan left openly professed a disdain for matrimony, which deviated from mainstream ideas about proper sexual relationships. These activists hoped that in the future, society would not be based on the institution of the family, but on free relations between men and women. These activists participated in sexual relationships outside of marriage based on what they deemed “friendship” “affection” and “mutual understanding.” Thus, some younger members of the Uruguayan left believed in sex before marriage, but advocated monogamous relationships instead of sexual promiscuity. In one interview with Marcha, male leftists also overall expressed positive views of women as partners in love and in the struggle against the dictatorship. One leftist student even argued that women struggled against the same system as men and that any person of consciousness, male or female should practice political militancy. While the interview ignored women’s individual voices, young leftist men also argued that women contributed greatly to the revolutionary struggle within Uruguay. The Tupamaros mirrored the ideas of the young Uruguayan left as the group supported sexual expression between monogamous heterosexual couples. These standards, however, applied more to Tupamaros than Tupamaras, whose romantic attachments seemed to be judged harsher than that of their male counterparts. Thus, the Tupamaros’ views on female sexuality in some ways paralleled gender and sexuality taboos within the larger Uruguayan society. One Tupamara reported that the group rarely discussed contraception and only at a superficial level. Male Tupamaros expected women to take responsibility for preventing pregnancies and women that did not assume responsibility for birth control were judged as irresponsible by the group.

The sexual double standard manifested in the group’s treatment of Tupamaro men who had accidentally impregnated their girlfriends. Only occasionally did leaders in the MLN-T express slight

140 “Jóvenes: entre la violencia y la sociedad ideal,” Marcha, June 13, 1969. BNU.

141 “Jóvenes,” 12.

142 “Jóvenes,” 12.

143 “Jóvenes,” 12.

144 “Jóvenes,” 12.

145 Araújo, Tupamaras, 224.

146 Araújo, Tupamaras, 192.

147 Araújo, Tupamaras, 192.
disapproval when a Tupamaro got a woman pregnant.\textsuperscript{148} When Tupamaro men needed money to pay for an abortion for some “girl they had gotten pregnant,” the organization provided funds along with a brief lecture on morals from the group leader.\textsuperscript{149} Ironically, while privately the Tupamaros supported abortion as a means to squelch any problems caused by irresponsible male members, politically its support of abortion has remained minimal.\textsuperscript{150}

In contrast to the Tupamaros, a limited number of leftist groups expressed more countercultural ideas about sexuality. The feminist faction of the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (PST) represented a group that supported a more open discourse about sexuality in Uruguay.\textsuperscript{151} The PST moved away from other socialist groups of the time by attempting to integrate specific feminist issues into leftist politics. Indeed, Uruguayan feminists of the PST critiqued the left for accepting the “double exploitation” of women, but ultimately postponing their liberation until after profound changes in social structures (as the Tupamaros advocated).\textsuperscript{152} The group fervently blamed unions and political organizations for continuing to place women’s liberation at the bottom of their political lists. For the PST, telling women to “wait for change” merely reinforced traditional feminine stereotypes of women as self sacrificing and always generous.\textsuperscript{153}

While most of Uruguayan society during the 1970s and early 80s marginalized homosexuals, the PST’s feminist platform called for an end to discrimination against gays and lesbians in employment, everyday life and in receiving custody of children.\textsuperscript{154} In contrast to the PST feminist platform, most Latin American groups with a Marxist base such as the Tupamaros did not openly support the rights of homosexuals or place it as priority in their activism. The PST’s stance on homosexual rights demonstrated revolutionary ideas and concepts rarely discussed within the Uruguayan left during the

\textsuperscript{148} Araújo, Tupamaras, 224.

\textsuperscript{149} Araújo, Tupamaras, 224.

\textsuperscript{150} Araújo, Tupamaras, 224. The MLN-T’s lack of political support for abortion rights has continued into recent years as a passionate fight for the de-criminalization of abortion emerged in Uruguay, without the backing of the Tupamaros. For a fuller discussion of abortion in Uruguay see the concluding chapter.

\textsuperscript{151} Versions of the Trotsky oriented PST existed in other countries such as Argentina, Peru, Colombia, Mexico and the United States. For more see Jorge Alonso, La tendencia al enmascaramiento de los movimientos politicos: el caso del Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 1985).

\textsuperscript{152} Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (PST), Mujeres en Movimiento, June 1983. CEDINCI.

\textsuperscript{153} PST, Mujeres en Movimiento, 1.

\textsuperscript{154} PST, Mujeres en Movimiento, 40.
1970s. Besides including homosexual rights in their platform, the PST also expressed very emphatic support for reproductive rights. The group called for free abortions, an end to forced sterilization, information about methods of birth control, comprehensive sexual education and an end to the societal sexual double standard for men and women.\textsuperscript{155} The demands of the feminist branch of the PST proved radical in comparison to the activism of the majority of Uruguayan socialists.

Other groups of the early 1980s, such as the aforementioned GRECMU and other feminist groups also hoped to redefine sexuality for Uruguayan women as more than a reproductive function.\textsuperscript{156} They openly discussed the sexual double standard, sexual violence and pleasure. According to GRECMU members, the Uruguayan media commonly portrayed Uruguayan women as maternal figures or conversely sexual objects for the consumption of men. These feminist groups attempted to educate women about their bodies and even featured diagrams and definitions concerning female sexuality. Some of these included explanations about the clitoris, estrogen and sexual dysfunction.\textsuperscript{157} They critiqued Uruguayan society for teaching women that their sexual organs were “dirty,” which in turn inhibited their quest for sexual pleasure. By featuring criticisms of societal constructions of sexuality, feminists argued for sexual freedom in a way very different than the Tupamaros and the rest of the Uruguayan left. According to GRECMU, women’s free use of her body derived from her own definitions of pleasure, not because of others’ denunciations of the bourgeois sexual practices of the middle class. Liberal feminists’ support for women’s sexual pleasure moved beyond allowing for serial monogamy or heterosexual relationships based on mutual attraction. Instead, these groups argued that female sexual power and pleasure should be defined individually, by women.\textsuperscript{158}

Despite the less than radical sexual practices of the group, Tupamaras’ deviations from conventional modes of feminine participation provoked an extreme reaction from those in positions of authority in Uruguay.\textsuperscript{159} Once imprisoned, the Tupamara’s undeniable deviance from proper Uruguayan constructions of femininity inspired their captors’ brutality to contain a specifically gendered character.

\textsuperscript{155} PST, \textit{Mujeres en Movimiento}, 41. For more on issues of forced sterilization in Latin America see Nancy Leys Stepan, \textit{The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 102-134.

\textsuperscript{156} \textit{La Cacerola}, vol. 2, no. 5 (October 1985): 1-2. CEDINCI.

\textsuperscript{157} \textit{La Cacerola}, 1-2.

\textsuperscript{158} \textit{La Cacerola}, 3.

\textsuperscript{159} SERPAJ, \textit{Uruguay Nunca Más}, 12.
Femininity and Masculinity in Prison

Of the 2,000 imprisoned Tupamaros, 450, or nearly 25% were women. The treatment of these women contained such a gendered character that government reports from within Uruguay as early as 1970 found that “especially harmful torture methods were applied to women.” Guards seemed to especially fear the Tupamaras and claimed that they could be more dangerous than male militants because of their supposed lack of femininity and violent tendencies. Thus, guards and state officials argued that the Tupamara deserved her punishment as she was not a “real” woman. According to one interrogator, because the Tupamara had attempted to enter the masculine realm of politics she deserved to be treated as a “man” by her captors. However, ultimately, government officials treated female and male Tupamaros very differently. The torture of women contained a specifically gendered character as guards punished female militants for their gender subversion, especially if the militant was pregnant. Indeed, women’s treatment in prison proved to be so different from men’s that a member of Uruguay’s military personnel wrote a letter to Amnesty International in 1976 denouncing the actions of his government. The official argued that:

[the women are a subject apart: officers, sub-officers and the troops gloated when young female prisoners arrived. Some even would come on their days off to participate in the interrogations. I have personally been present for the worse aberrations committed with women in front of other prisoners by several interrogators. Many of the women detained were there to learn the whereabouts of husbands or fathers or sons, there was no accusation against them.]

Therefore, officials subjected women to especially vicious torture, often of a sexual nature. One survey from SERPAJ found that seven percent of both male and female prisoners reported being raped. Within these assaults, torturers often inserted mutilating devices into the vagina or anus. However, even SERPAJ asserted that rape statistics for prisoners were probably higher because of the difficulties of

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161 SERPAJ, Uruguay Nunca Más, 12.

162 Araújo, Tupamaras, 233.

163 Araújo, Tupamaras, 233.

164 SERPAJ, Uruguay Nunca Más, 99.

talking about sexual assault. Furthermore, the survey excluded forms of sexual abuse usually perpetrated against women such as fondling or non-penetrative harassment. Guards’ disgust for the feminine also translated into women prisoners suffering extra humiliation during menstruation. Several political prisoners reported that menstruating women suffered particular outbursts of rage from male guards. One female prisoner attributed this anger to macho ideologies. She recalled, “It looked as if they got especially enraged because they could not accept the fact that a woman was doing things improper for her sex.”

For imprisoned pregnant Tupamaras, torture took on a gendered characteristic. Besides degradation within the group about their pregnancy, government officials also generally chastised pregnant Tupamaras for expecting a child while belonging to a militant group. For these officials, the most important aspects of Uruguayan women’s lives should be family, obtaining economic security and reproduction. To show their disgust at Tupamaras’ gender subversion, interrogators constantly asked one pregnant militant how could she rank her child and family second to a “man’s war.” Government officials also assumed that unmarried, pregnant Tupamaras must be sexually promiscuous. Interrogators told one Tupamara who was in her third month of pregnancy that it was the ideal month to “get fucked” by her captors. Uruguayan officials also frequently touched the Tupamaras’ stomach, claiming they planned to kill the child by kicking the militant. After the frequent abuse the Tupamara lost her child. Therefore, pregnant Tupamaras suffered tremendous abuse from prison officials because of their perceived gender deviance.

166 SERPAJ, Uruguay Nunca Más, 16.
167 SERPAJ, Uruguay Nunca Más, 101.
168 In order to address the problem of incarcerated pregnant combatants, the MLN-T allegedly developed two positions. One was that the imprisoned Tupamara must disclose the pregnancy to the government in order to lessen the severity of torture. This proved to be an essentially futile suggestion since pregnant Tupamaras often received even harsher treatments than men. On the other side of the debate, MLN-T members contended that women should never benefit from special treatment in comparison with their comrades. Either way, the debate about pregnant Tupamaras rendered women invisible as it offered them little freedom in deciding what to disclose to their torturers. See Araújo, Tupamaras, 164.
169 Araújo, Tupamaras, 164.
170 Araújo, Tupamaras, 164.
171 Araújo, Tupamaras, 200.
172 Araújo, Tupamaras, 200.
173 Araújo, Tupamaras, 200.
Testimonies of female political prisoners during the Southern Cone dictatorships of the 1960s through 1980s further demonstrate the humiliating gendered nature of torture and imprisonment. In her essay, “Surviving Beyond Fear: Women and Torture in Latin America,” Ximena Bunster-Burotto argues that military regimes, such as Uruguay, specifically exhibited gender differences in torture in order to secure the “privileged status of masculinity.” Indeed, more than any other patriarchal institution the authoritarian state strives to perpetuate the values of masculinity, the military and power. Undoubtedly, Uruguayan torturers employed attacks specifically designed to degrade women, most commonly through violent sexual attacks. According to prison officials, Tupamaras had dared to introduce themselves to the political world of men and in turn deserved punishment. Some Tupamaras believed that they received extra punishment because they threatened the Uruguayan government and society by destroying traditional models of femininity. Thus, just as the Tupamaros broke from traditional models of the left, the role of women in the group also deviated from the societal mold of the passive Uruguayan woman.

Uruguayan interrogators employed sexual violence against female political prisoners as a means of control and to exert masculine authority. Once in prison, many women reported having cigarettes extinguished on their breasts by interrogators. One prisoner, Sara Youtchak had her breasts completely covered in cigarette burns. Reports also illustrate the commonality of rape (usually committed by three to twenty-seven men) in interrogation sessions. Soldiers subjected young women in particular to habitual rape. In one case, a pregnant prisoner was raped by twenty-five different men causing her to miscarry. Interrogators also brought in the fathers of young women prisoners to witness the torture and sometimes rape of their daughters. This degradation and humiliation fit into a larger framework of patriarchal

175 In her work Myths of Modernity: Peonage and Patriarchy in Nicaragua, Elizabeth Dore argues that patriarchy and not merely capitalism provided the organizing principle for Nicaragua’s economic system during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For more on how issues of patriarchy influence politics and the economy and vice versa see also Patty Kelly, Lydia Open Door: Inside Mexico’s Most Modern Brothel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
177 Araújo, Tupamaras, 165.
178 “Mujeres Uruguayas Víctimas Del Fascismo.” Bobbye Ortiz Papers.
179 “Mujeres Uruguayas Víctimas Del Fascismo.”
180 “Mujeres Uruguayas Víctimas Del Fascismo.”
relations in Uruguay. Through these sexual assaults, female prisoners lost their dignity and socially constructed notions of purity. In turn, fathers could do nothing to protect their daughter’s honor. Non-cooperative male prisoners also sometimes had female relatives brought into prison. Interrogators sexually assaulted wives and daughters in front of their lovers, husbands or fathers in order to manipulate information out of the prisoner.\textsuperscript{181}

Along with their gendered torture, imprisoned Tupamaras also often felt marginalized by the MLN-T, especially when compared with their incarcerated male counterparts. For example, activities within the men’s prison seemed to be inspired by crudeness and sexism.\textsuperscript{182} One group member reported that in Punta Carretas Prison, during recess, Tupamaro political prisoners often played soccer games, which contained a specifically chauvinistic quality. During their games, the male prisoners named one team the “Proletarian Penis” which played against a team called the “Bourgeoisie Vagina.”\textsuperscript{183} While the political prisoners associated the despised bourgeoisie with the female anatomy, Tupamaro men referred to their sexual organs as proletariat. Beyond the obvious connotations of the superiority of the male anatomy, the two teams played against each other in a battle of not only the sexes, but of classes.\textsuperscript{184} Therefore, the group degraded women’s sexuality by associating their genitalia with the class that the Tupamaros hoped to overthrow.

Even while incarcerated, male MLN-T members participated in writing theoretical and tactical political tracts and maintained close contact with outside revolutionaries. In contrast, the Tupamaros rarely asked women to participate in the creation of theory and strategy while incarcerated. One Tupamara reported that incarcerated militant women’s political position and practical experiences seemed to matter little to the group.\textsuperscript{185} While female militants had limited influence from prison, in Punta Carretas men’s prison the Tupamaros maintained political and administrative structures in groups named the C-1 and the C-2.\textsuperscript{186} The C-1 group created strategies, debated national and international politics and


\textsuperscript{182} Araújo, \textit{Tupamaras}, 125.

\textsuperscript{183} Araújo, \textit{Tupamaras}, 125.

\textsuperscript{184} Araújo, \textit{Tupamaras}, 125.

\textsuperscript{185} Araújo, \textit{Tupamaras}, 179.

\textsuperscript{186} Arrarás, “Political Participation,” 103.
kept in contact with the Executive Committee whenever possible. The C-2 presided over activities in prison such as study groups and physical exercise. Incarcerated male leaders also made important tactical decisions from prison.\footnote{Arrarás, “Political Participation,” 103.} For instance, leaders at Punta Carretas concocted the “Cacao Plan” which focused on bombing “bourgeois” buildings (it ultimately failed).\footnote{Arrarás, “Political Participation,” 163.} After a debate with members outside of jail, incarcerated male leaders also decided that the group would support the electoral campaign of the Frente Amplio.\footnote{Arrarás, “Political Participation,” 168.} Therefore, women’s prisons had little formal structure or opportunity for leadership. Instead of participating in political decisions, imprisoned Tupamaras usually exercised and studied literature.\footnote{Arrarás, “Political Participation,” 104.}

While female Tupamaros performed prison breaks, some former members argued that most of their escapes functioned as actions of propaganda for the MLN-T. According to some Tupamaras, female militants’ escapes ultimately had little influence or importance within the group on either a political or military level.\footnote{Araújo, Tupamaras, 179.} These Tupamaras reported feeling useless within the MLN-T, even after their imprisonment and torture because of their association with the organization. Though women’s prison breaks created propaganda supporting the power and technical superiority of the Tupamaros, the liberation of the men’s prisons produced positive press and also the freedom of important revolutionaries. Thus, the organization saw male prison escapes as also recovering valuable members who contributed to the fight for the liberation of Uruguay.\footnote{Araújo, Tupamaras, 180.}

Even the nature of the prison breaks and their public perception contained a gendered element. The escape from the men’s prison, Punta Carretas, required the work of engineers and was seen by the left as brilliantly calculated.\footnote{Araújo, Tupamaras, 180.} In contrast, craftiness and trickery enabled Operation Dove, an escape from the women’s prison that occurred with little violence. Many in the public who greatly sympathized with the Tupamaros viewed women as using more feminine or crafty means to escape during Operation

\footnote{Arrarás, “Political Participation,” 103.}
\footnote{Arrarás, “Political Participation,” 163.}
\footnote{Arrarás, “Political Participation,” 168.}
\footnote{Arrarás, “Political Participation,” 104.}
\footnote{Araújo, Tupamaras, 179.}
\footnote{Araújo, Tupamaras, 180.}
\footnote{Araújo, Tupamaras, 180. See also Joseph Novitski, “A Strategy of Long, Dangerous Political Warfare,” NYT, September 12, 1971.}
Dove. After the escape in 1970, people on the street reacted to the Tupamaras’ actions by putting their own spin on a Portuguese commercial where a Brazilian boy exclaims about instant coffee, “You have to drink it, everybody drinks it…and women too!” People in Uruguay appropriated aspects of the commercial and joked that “women too” could escape from prison. Thus, the publicity and reaction to Operation Dove had a specifically gendered tone as people joked that even women managed to escape prison in Uruguay.

Women’s prison escapes also had international implications, which perhaps misrepresented the true nature of these seemingly gendered actions. For example, in the Marxist Red Papers periodical, published in the US, a special issue about women’s fight for liberation featured the Tupamara jailbreak. According to the Red Papers, the freeing of the Tupamaras demonstrated the ability of socialism to also prioritize women’s rights. Choosing March 8, International Women’s Day as the day to stage the jailbreak supposedly showed the MLN-T’s commitment to women’s rights. According to a reprint from the Cuban newspaper Granma in the Red Papers, the coordination of Operation Dove demonstrated flawless planning on behalf of the group as female prisoners overpowered a guard during Sunday mass. Waiting to take the escaped female prisoners was an ambulance, two taxi cabs, three private cars and a fake police car.

Therefore, to the international left, female militants’ escape demonstrated another example of the tactical superiority of the Tupamaros. Choosing to free the prisoners on International Women’s Day brought another gendered level of consciousness to the Tupamaros’ actions. To MLN-T supporters, the action solidified the notion that the group prioritized women’s rights. To capitalize on the positive press, after Operation Dove an MLN-T bulletin published the escaped female combatants’ photos and wrote, “It’s true, one cannot accomplish the revolution without them.” However, according to the testimony of one Tupamara, the fact that the group freed the prisoners on March 8 turned out to be

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194 Araújo, Tupamaras, 180.
195 Araújo, Tupamaras, 181.
196 Araújo, Tupamaras, 181.
198 “Free Political Prisoners,” 19.
199 “Free Political Prisoners,” 19.
200 Araújo, Tupamaras, 146.
purely coincidental. She claims that only later did the Tupamaros learn that March 8 was International Women’s Day.\textsuperscript{201} The MLN-T subsequently used this fact to bolster their international propaganda, which was ultimately successful as the international press asserted the tactical superiority of the group as well as their focus on women’s rights. Therefore, according to some Tupamaras, women’s prison escapes focused on increasing positive propaganda for the organization, particularly the jail break that happened to occur on International Women’s Day.

**The Tupamaros and Homosexuality**

For the Tupamaros, other Tupamara prison breaks revealed the existence of homosexual predators inside of the inhumane prison system of Uruguay. Instead of mentioning the frequent sexual assaults perpetrated on female prisoners by male guards, in an explanation of Operation Estrella, another mission liberating Tupamaras from prison, the Tupamaros chided the angry lesbian guards that manhandled and molested female militants.\textsuperscript{202} While most likely same sex abuse occurred, the MLN-T demonstrated an ignorance or perhaps apathy concerning the rampant sexual assault women experienced in prison. Furthermore, when describing the conditions of men’s prisons, the Uruguayan left not only denounced sub-par nutrition and medical care, but also pointed to the militants’ exposure to homosexuals in prison. Indeed, two thirds of political prisoners were confined in prisons that placed them with the regular prison population.\textsuperscript{203}

One article in *Marcha* concerning political prisoners contended that “homosexuality [in prison] creates daily problems of all types.”\textsuperscript{204} The Uruguayan left criticized prison authorities for not searching for intelligent solutions to the problems of so-called deviants in prison. Assuming that no political

\textsuperscript{201} Araújo, *Tupamaras*, 147.


\textsuperscript{203} SERPAJ, *Uruguay: Nunca Más*, 121.

activist could also identify as homosexual, the article lamented that prison authorities placed homosexual prisoners in cells with political prisoners. These placements provoked situations that ended in violence (in which homosexuals were to blame). To prove their point, the article cited the case of a young prisoner who cut an “active” homosexual with a piece of glass from a window.\footnote{“Cárceles: Más Allá de los Muros,” Marcha, July 2, 1971. BNU.} Prison authorities placed the young man in solitary confinement for years and he returned from his punishment with severe mental illnesses.\footnote{“Cárceles,” 11.} Thus, the Uruguayan left presented prisons as dangerous places for Tupamaros and other political prisoners not only because of human rights violations but because of predatory homosexuals. The sympathy for the youth who stabbed the homosexual inmate demonstrated the deeply rooted disdain many in the left had for gays and lesbians.\footnote{“Cárceles,” 11.}

According to another article in Marcha, male prisoners had their natural sexual instincts squelched by solitude and a lack of interaction with the other sex. In turn, prisoners turned to masturbation and other practices deemed deviant (such as homosexuality).\footnote{“Prision y Fueros,” Marcha, January 12, 1973. BNU.} The writers of the article argued that men needed to propagate their species and prison stifled these desires which led to violent, deviant behavior. Therefore, prison supposedly destroyed the morals of inmates and supported onanism and pedastery.\footnote{“Prision y Fueros,” 11.} Exposure to these sexual practices demonstrated another violation of human rights within prisons in Uruguay. Sympathy for the sexual life of solely male prisoners reinforced traditional ideas about gender as well as supported homophobia.\footnote{“Prision y Fueros,” 11.}

However, when men experienced gendered humiliation in prison, it was most likely because of state sponsored torturers, not predatory homosexuals. During interrogations, officials applied electric current to prisoners’ testicles and feminized their victims by taunting them about their manhood and the size of their penises.\footnote{SERPAJ, Uruguay: Nunca Más. 106.} Guards referred to male prisoners in feminine derogatory terms such as “the putrid bitch.”\footnote{SERPAJ, Uruguay: Nunca Más. 106.} They also degraded the looks of male prisoners and particularly commented on their
weight. During frequent confiscations of items in male prisoners’ rooms guards attempted to emasculate prisoners with sexualized insults. Reports indicate that guards often looked at pictures of male prisoners’ wives or girlfriends and asked, “How many is she fucking now, this whore?” Thus, psychological torment had a specifically gendered character as it focused on destroying the honor and masculinity of prisoners’ mates. Similar to the rapes of female family members in front of incarcerated males, these acts aimed to destroy the male prisoner by emasculating him. Through their treatment as “passives” in prison, literary critic Jean Franco argues that male political prisoners inadvertently gained insight into the daily subjugation experienced by women. Male prisoners began to understand how it felt to constantly be cognizant of the body, to be taunted and abused and to find comfort in daily activities such as laundry or talking with friends. While incarcerated men experienced what some women did on a daily basis in greater Uruguayan society, once outside of prison their political consciousness rarely reflected any change concerning gender constructions.

Outside of prison, the Tupamaros viewed both homosexuality and its association with the feminine as negative and counter revolutionary. Indeed, the MLN-T’s ideas about homosexuality proved to be similar to their rightist military enemies. Like the Uruguayan military, the Tupamaros supported the polarization of masculine/feminine and active/passive, with feminine and passive as synonymous. The Tupamaros considered “passivity” in both males and females as undesirable and harmful to the revolution. Thus, the Tupamaros, like the Uruguayan armed forces, ultimately excluded those who supported what they deemed open sexual deviations. During the 1960s and 70s, many Tupamaros generally believed that homosexuality was a bourgeois vice or in the best case scenario a sickness or mental illness. For its part, besides exclusion from the military, the Uruguayan dictatorship enforced a

213 SERPAJ, Uruguay: Nunca Más, 159.
214 SERPAJ, Uruguay: Nunca Más, 150.
218 Araújo, Tupamaras, 224.
social science curriculum for students in the 1970s which taught that homosexuality, along with abortion and student revolt, represented deviation and a loss of morality.\textsuperscript{219}

In general, Tupamaro notions about homosexuality proved to be similar to the 1971 Declaration by the First National Congress on Education in Culture in Cuba. The Congress stated that:

\begin{quote}
The social pathological character of homosexual deviations was recognized [at the congress]. It was resolved that all manifestations of homosexual deviations are to be firmly rejected and prevented from spreading...Cultural institutions cannot serve as a platform for false intellectuals who try to make snobbery, extravagant conduct and other social aberrations into expressions of revolutionary spirit and art, isolated from the masses and the spirit of the revolution.\textsuperscript{220}
\end{quote}

Therefore, as adherents to Che’s idea of the “New Man,” the Tupamaros’ believed that homosexuality represented, “a pathology which reflects left-over bourgeois decadence and has no place in the formation of the New Man.”\textsuperscript{221}

In comparison to the Tupamaros, the greater Uruguayan society did not fare much better in their treatment of homosexuals. Indeed, while Uruguay never passed any official laws condemning homosexuality during the twentieth century, it never attempted to protect homosexuals either.\textsuperscript{222}

Ultimately, homosexuality, like race, often seemed to be invisible in Uruguayan society. As late as the 1980s, gays and lesbians reported that publicly no language even existed to interpret their sexuality.\textsuperscript{223}

Uruguayan society, therefore, often ignored homosexuality and especially the reality of homosexual desire. Homosexuals in Uruguay reported living a double life and lying about their sexuality in order to keep their jobs and families. In contrast to reports about Uruguay’s open minded politics, many homosexuals of the 1970s and 80s attested to the conservative nature of Uruguay and its supposedly

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\textsuperscript{221} Allen Young, ed., Gays Under the Cuban Revolution (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1981), 98.

\textsuperscript{222} Ettore Pierri and Luciana Possamay, eds., Hablan los Otros (Montevideo: Proyección, 1987), 24. For another look at issues of homosexual repression in Uruguay and the rest of the Southern Cone see Carlos Basilio Muñoz, Uruguay homosexual: culturas, minorías y discriminación desde una sociología de la homosexualidad (Montevideo: Ediciones Trilce, 1996) and James Green, Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Brazil (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

\textsuperscript{223} Pierri and Possamay, Hablan los Otros, 24.
\end{footnotesize}
traditional people. Therefore, Uruguayan homosexuals expressed little hope for change in a country that contained what they deemed “conservatives” and “oppressors.”

Some activist gays and lesbians in Uruguay refuted the assumption from many in the left that homosexuality represented a symptom of the so-called decadence of society. Instead, they traced hunger, unemployment and torture to be the result of a decadent society, not sexual orientation. Other homosexual students and activists blamed the legacy of colonialism in Uruguay for the repression of homosexuals. Like the greater Uruguayan left, these activists linked their struggle to the subjugation of indigenous peoples and those of African descent throughout the world. Some Uruguayan homosexuals viewed their experiences and categorization as “other” as similar to the repression of blacks in Africa and the United States. They argued that such othering by the state justified both racial and sexual violence. Once again, another segment of Uruguayan activists created parallels with their experiences and the civil rights struggle in the United States. According to these homosexual activists, repressive governments, like the Uruguayan dictatorship and the US, attempted to create a place where all citizens acted the same and supported a similar vision of the world.

Instead of attacking the left directly, other gay and lesbian activists in Uruguay blamed capitalism and its exploitation of workers for the marginalization of homosexuals. They argued that the heterosexual family produced more workers which capitalism hoped to exploit. While some homosexual activists blamed capitalism and stayed true to Marxist ideals, many contended that both the left and the right wing political parties participated in exclusionary practices and supported antiquated notions about sexuality. These homosexual activists attested to homophobia in labor movements, social movements and all political parties in Uruguay, no matter what the political affiliation.

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224 Pierri and Possamay, Hablan los Otros, 23.
225 Pierri and Possamay, Hablan los Otros, 61.
226 Pierri and Possamay, Hablan los Otros, 16.
227 Pierri and Possamay, Hablan los Otros, 20.
228 Pierri and Possamay, Hablan los Otros, 20.
230 Pierri and Possamay, Hablan los Otros, 25.
231 Pierri and Possamay, Hablan los Otros, 35.
Some homosexual activists saw the transition to democracy in the 1980s as an opportunity to fight for inclusion in the emerging state. These activists never denied what they saw as Uruguay’s prejudicial mentality concerning homosexuality, but also hoped that the emerging Uruguayan democracy could create rights for sexual minorities. Uruguay’s homosexual activists especially looked to the university as a site to rouse activism. During the 1980s and the transition to democracy, the university became a place to debate issues of personal liberty, democracy and ideas about respect for a plurality of opinions and lifestyles. Despite a hope for inclusion in the new state, the Uruguayan government and many leftist groups failed to prioritize the rights of homosexuals and rarely acknowledged their struggles.

To many of their admirers, the Tupamaros represented a group committed to integrating women into the revolutionary struggle. Undeniably, the MLN-T subverted traditional concepts of women as maternal nurturers and inherently non-violent. The group also offered a space for deviation from the common construction, even within the Uruguayan left, of women as politically passive. However, while some of the Tupamaros’ attitudes towards women demonstrated a progressive stance, overall the group never prioritized women’s struggle for liberation on their own terms. For the MLN-T, the participation of women in the fight against the dictatorship automatically implied women’s liberation.

The Tupamaros used popular societal stereotypes about women as harmless in order to help them in armed missions. The group especially praised female militants’ work on service teams and their ability to gain entrance to certain places less accessible to men. However, despite somewhat stereotypical representations of the role of Tupamaras, the MLN-T also included women in armed missions and taught them how to handle weapons. As prisoner Geoffrey Jackson observed, only when a Tupamara held a gun did complete differentiation between the sexes cease within the MLN-T. Indeed, the group often used guns as a great phallic equalizer.

232 Pierri and Possamay, Hablan los Otros, 61.
233 Pierri and Possamay, Hablan los Otros, 61.
234 Pierri and Possamay, Hablan los Otros, 61.
While the Tupamaros offered a new type of political participation for women, they also expected female militants to “lose” their femininity and especially reject motherhood as their inspiration for revolution. In order to be an accepted member of the Tupamaros, the group encouraged women to transform into socially constructed notions of the masculine militant. In contrast, many other groups within the Uruguayan left accentuated women’s roles as wives and mothers as inspiration for their political participation. However, within either option—embracing femininity/maternity or masculinity—dichotomous gender restrictions often confined women’s political participation to constructed gender norms. A female militant had the option of embracing her motherhood or femininity as a source of political activism or transforming into a “pseudo-male.” However, despite these restrictions, all of the aforementioned groups also offered women a vehicle for political participation and opened a new space for women to articulate their politics, something very limited to them before the 1960s and 70s. Indeed, whether under the banner of motherhood or the cult of masculinity, women publicly protested human rights violations and fought for revolutionary change in Latin America. They contributed to the struggle against repression with undeniable restrictions, but in ways vastly different and much more public than in the past.

Issues of sexuality played a significant part in the treatment of female militants by both their comrades and the Uruguayan state. Despite rhetoric of equality within the MLN-T, female militants experienced double standards concerning their sexuality. If a Tupamara became pregnant, the MLN-T punished the militant by excluding her from group actions long after giving birth. The treatment of male militants, however, remained unchanged even after they became fathers. Furthermore, while the group supported somewhat freer ideas about sexual expression in monogamous relationships than the greater Uruguayan society, the Tupamaros expected women to ultimately take responsibility for the prevention of pregnancy.

The treatment of the incarcerated Tupamara proved to be much harsher than that of her male counterparts and had a specifically sexual character. Female militants’ punishment for being gender traitors consisted of sexual harassment and assault, particularly for the pregnant female combatant.

235 Araújo, Tupamaras, 189.

236 See for example Margaret Randall, Our Voices, Our Lives: Stories of Women from Central America and the Caribbean (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1995). As a US feminist and expatriate living in Latin America between 1960 and 1984, Margaret Randall’s work shifted from romantic representations of the Nicaraguan and Cuban revolutions to a critique of the sexism and homophobia within socialism. Nevertheless, she argued that the idea of equality in socialist movements enabled and inadvertently supported a space for the subversion of traditional ideologies concerning gender and sexual identity.
Indeed, pregnant Tupamaras often received greater torture from Uruguayan state officials as they had dared to defy socially constructed notions of proper femininity and ideas about motherhood. Incarcerated Tupamaras’ treatment by the MLN-T also succeeded in marginalizing the female militant. Once in prison, male MLN-T members had opportunities to lead missions and produce ideological tracts while the incarcerated Tupamara usually functioned as an arm of propaganda for the organization.

The state also subjected imprisoned men to gendered forms of torture as guards attempted to feminize them with insults about their appearance and the honor of female relatives and lovers. Beyond torture by the state, the Uruguayan left envisioned prison life as treacherous because of political prisoners’ contact with alleged homosexual predators. Even outside of prison, the Uruguayan left generally disdained homosexuality or ignored its existence all together. During the 1960s and 70s, the Tupamaros followed the Cuban Communist Party line that homosexuality represented bourgeois deviance or at best a psychological sickness.

Just as homosexuality was seen by the MLN-T as a symptom of an unchecked bourgeoisie, many Tupamaros also viewed feminism as secondary to the revolutionary project. By the 1980s, due in large part to marginalization from the Uruguayan left, autonomous feminist groups emerged within Uruguay to fight against gender oppression. These organizations consciously prioritized common gender interests and not class as the primary inspiration for their activism. These feminist groups often went to battle against the Tupamaros and the greater Uruguayan left, especially concerning issues of reproductive rights. In the next, concluding chapter I trace the path of the Tupamaros to electoral solutions and their subsequent gender politics.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

“General strategic lines…are subject to modification with the change of circumstances” - Tupamaro Manifesto.¹

In 2009, ex-Tupamaro and Frente Amplio member José “El Pepe” Mujica won the presidency of Uruguay. While it is difficult to imagine that any Tupamaro who suffered years of imprisonment and torture could ever obtain a high position of power in the Uruguayan government, within only a few years of their release from prison numerous Tupamaros learned to successfully navigate electoral politics.²

Calling for democratic solutions to the problems within Uruguay, the Tupamaros participated in all elections after 1989. In 1994, founding member of the Tupamaros, José Mujica, became the first MLN-T member to be elected to the Uruguayan parliament.³ In 2004, Tabaré Vázquez, leader of the ruling Frente Amplio coalition, won with an absolute majority, making him the first center-left president in modern Uruguayan history.

The popularity of the Frente Amplio, which had significant numbers of Tupamaros in its coalition, disrupted the traditional party politics of Uruguay. Indeed, for nearly two hundred years, two traditional parties dominated the Uruguayan political scene—the aforementioned Nacional Party


² Similar to the work done by Vania Markarian about the Uruguayan left, Astrid Arrarás has posited that another reason for the MLN-T’s eventual acceptance of democratic ideas and institutions derived in part from the transnational connections they forged while in exile. Indeed, while in exile, Tupamaro members had access to new ideas, media, and interactions with other non-violent leftist groups. These transnational connections and exchanges helped many in the Tupamaros re-evaluate their beliefs about the political expediency of violence. Furthermore, the Tupamaros also embraced democracy because it offered a better alternative than the previous repressive dictatorship. Thus, Arrarás also suggests that the trauma Tupamaro members experienced under the dictatorship and their large rates of incarceration challenged group members to re-think previous ideologies and tactics. See Arrarás, “Political Learning,” 23-24.

³ At the end of the dictatorships during the 1980s and 90s, guerrilla groups throughout the Southern Cone turned to electoral politics, though with less success than the Tupamaros. In Brazil, members of the Ação de Libertacao Nacional joined other leftist political organizations; the former Argentine Montoneros comprised the “Peronismo Revolucionario” within the Peronist Movement; previous members of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario (MIR) in Chile joined a “refurbished” section of the Socialist party. See Charles Gillespie, Negotiating Democracy: Politicians and General in Uruguay (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 232.
(formerly known as Blanco) and the Colorado Party. While political opponents of the Frente Amplio criticized the party’s inclusion of the Tupamaros due to their violent past, most Uruguayans ignored these tactics. In their campaigns, members of the MLN-T reassured the public of their departure from past political ideologies and tactics. On an international level, for some critics, the triumph of the Frente Amplio and the Tupamaros in the twenty-first century represented another example of the alleged socialist takeover of Latin America. Following the election of Vázquez, political analyst Jaime Yaffé predicted, “Everything indicates that with the inauguration of Vázquez, we will be in a new country that will put an end to neo-liberal policies to focus attention on social problems and abandon automatic alignment with the United States.”

Even those that did not condemn the leftward turn in Latin America often lumped together the elections of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva and the Workers' Party in Brazil, Néstor Kirchner in Argentina, Evo Morales in Bolivia and Vázquez in Uruguay. Latin American historian Jorge Castañeda has attributed all of the aforementioned elections as part of a backlash against free market reforms, openness to allying with the United States and the consolidation of democracy. Therefore, the multiple players in this Latin American “left wing tsunami” as Castañeda deemed it, all appear to have similar agendas. However, the political actions and ideologies of the Frente Amplio and the Tupamaros did and do not necessarily reflect a simplistic backlash against the US and neoliberal economic policies. Indeed, as he campaigned for president during the summer of 2009 Mujica vowed to distance the Uruguayan left from:

The stupid ideologies that come from the 1970s…I refer to things like unconditional love of everything that is state-run, scorn for businessmen and intrinsic hate of the United States. I'll shout it if they want: Down with isms! Up with a left that is capable of thinking outside the box! In other words, I am more than completely cured of simplifications, of dividing the world into good and evil, of thinking in black and white. I have repented!

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5 Luxner, “Uruguay is the Latest South American Country to Veer Left.”


7 Castañeda, “Latin America’s Left Turn.”

As a former pro-violence guerrilla, Mujica may have left some perplexed when he seemingly rejected Tupamaro ideology. Indeed, one of the most admired figures of the Tupamaros, Che Guevara, once deemed the United States “the great enemy of mankind.”

However, after tracing the ideology of the Tupamaros, Mujica’s disdain for political simplifications is not surprising. In the late 1960s, in a communique released by the MLN-T, members asserted the political malleability of their group. They contended, “We do not call it an ‘-ism.’ We are a huge movement whose militants include all sorts of groups from Marxist to Catholic and we do not need an ‘-ism.’” Therefore, even during the height of the Cold War, the group refused to categorize themselves with specific labels. The group’s disdain for confining categories continues to the present day as MLN-T members hope to create a new left, influenced by their own unique experiences as Uruguayan revolutionaries. Considering the complex ideologies and actions of the Tupamaros over the last forty seven years, the group’s departure from their past beliefs should not come as a surprise. Indeed, the Tupamaros’ lack of a monolithic ideology was and continues to be their unifying ideology.

**A Malleable Ideology**

The Tupamaros’ ability to easily integrate new ideas into their politics derives in part from Uruguay’s historical freedom from stringent ideological influences. During colonial times, the Spanish applauded what they deemed the “free” lifestyle within Uruguay. Indigenous peoples, mestizos, pirates and bandits from Brazil and deserters from ships of various nations all contributed to the so-called frontier conditions within the region. Control from Europe proved to be so insignificant that the King of Spain only ordered the official creation of the capital city Montevideo in 1726 after feeling pressure from the encroachment of the Portuguese.

Showing the lack of strength of the church in the region, in 1830, Uruguay contained only 100 Catholic priests for 128,000 inhabitants. Therefore, Uruguay’s fringe status during colonial times created a unique society as the state, church and oligarchic elites never gained a significant amount of power in the country. Thus, no specific or strict mold existed

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concerning issues of politics, economics or religion in Uruguay. This “weak colonial legacy” enabled Uruguay’s variant state building processes when compared with their Latin American counterparts.\(^{13}\)

Thus, by the time the move towards modernization occurred in the late nineteenth century, the common forces throughout Latin America that resisted change and controlled the master political narrative remained feeble. According to Francisco Panizza, the lack of powerful economic elites and church ties to politics allowed Uruguay to take a more democratic, liberal and politically flexible path than its neighbors.\(^{14}\)

Surrounded by rhetoric of Uruguay’s exceptional liberal democracy, the Tupamaros simultaneously found inspiration from political violence as well as their country’s democratic past. Therefore, since their inception, members of the Tupamaros demonstrated a unique ability to integrate multiple and seemingly conflicting ideologies into their politics. This flexibility extended to group member’s transformation from pro-violence revolutionaries into candidates seeking electoral solutions, largely because of political necessity and expediency. Thus, the Tupamaros embraced electoral politics because it offered a better alternative than the previous repressive dictatorship. Undoubtedly, the trauma Tupamaro members experienced under the dictatorship and their large rates of incarceration challenged group members to re-think previous ideologies and tactics.\(^{15}\) Some scholars like Richard Gillespie argue that for the Tupamaros, “bourgeois democracy has become preferable to bourgeois dictatorship.”\(^{16}\) Embracing the long tradition of Uruguayan democracy gave MLN-T members an opportunity to achieve political prominence and a previously unavailable platform to speak about their hope for transformation of Uruguayan society as a whole.\(^{17}\) As early as the 1960s the group claimed to support a “realistic”

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approach to gaining power in Uruguay. According to the Tupamaros, this approach could change in a day, month or year depending on the circumstances in Uruguay.\(^\text{18}\)

Besides their ability to navigate democratic politics after their violent past, the actions of the Tupamaros after the transition to democracy demonstrate the immense ideological and political flexibility of the group. The Tupamaros even changed fundamental aspects of their social ideologies. For example, by the twenty-first century, the Tupamaros altered their ideologies about homosexuality. As my research demonstrates, the Tupamaros initially adhered to stridently homophobic thinking. Yet by 2007, the Tupamaros reversed their attitude towards homosexuality. That year the ruling Frente Amplio party, which included significant numbers of Tupamaros, affirmed the rights of homosexuals by passing legislation approving a bill allowing civil unions for homosexual couples. The bill gave homosexual couples who lived together for five years or more the same rights as married couples.\(^\text{19}\) By approving this legislation, Uruguay became the first country in Latin America to approve nationwide civil unions. Thus, Tupamaros, who formerly denied homosexuals an equal place in the revolutionary struggle, supported the passage of rights for homosexuals. Just as they changed from pro-violence to supporting electoral solutions, the group demonstrated their capabilities for political flexibility concerning homosexual rights.

While the Tupamaros may have demonstrated a more progressive stance about homosexuality, some feminists criticized the group for not supporting a 2008 abortion bill.\(^\text{20}\) While the Tupamaros at least partially changed their views about the supposed bourgeois decadence of homosexuality, members of the MLN-T proved to be more dubious of the feminist movement and issues of reproductive rights. In November 2008, thanks to years of work by feminists, the Frente Amplio majority in the Uruguayan Senate voted to decriminalize abortion, allowing for the termination of pregnancy within the first twelve weeks of pregnancy. However, without a substantial majority of the Frente Amplio coalition to override his decision, President Vázquez vetoed the bill. This decision deeply disappointed Uruguayan feminists who had fought hard for what would have been revolutionary legislation. To date, Cuba and Mexico City are the only two places in Latin America that allow for abortions without restrictions.\(^\text{21}\)


Some feminists explicitly blamed the Tupamaro faction of the Frente Amplio for not supporting the legislation and ultimately allowing Vázquez to veto the bill. This charge proves fascinating considering the common notion held by many on the left that the Tupamaros constituted one of the most revolutionary groups concerning women’s liberation. Despite the MLN-T’s earlier reputation as advocates of gender equality, when it came to openly supporting reproductive rights for women, the Tupamaros retreated into a more conservative stance. Yet as this dissertation shows, the Tupamaros had a complicated attitude towards women that often contradicted feminist agendas. The controversy over the Tupamaros’ stance on gay rights and abortion represents one of many examples that prove the difficulties of simplistically categorizing the politics of the MLN-T. Similarly, this political malleability also illuminates some of the reasons behind the Tupamaros’ and Frente Amplio’s current support of neoliberal economic policies for Uruguay.

The Guerrilla as Neoliberal

Although during the 1960s and 70s the Tupamaros vehemently opposed the infusion of foreign capital into Uruguay, on the campaign trail Mujica promised to continue the Frente Amplio’s “investor friendly policies.” Therefore, while Castañeda and others homogenized the government of the Frente Amplio with the Chávez regime, Mujica and his party have supported free market economic policies and pushed for a friendly dialogue with the US. So how did the Tupamaros become supporters of the free market economy? My research provides clues as to why the Tupamaros would change their position. I posit that the MLN-T demonstrated a willingness to integrate other ideas from abroad, even from the often maligned United States. Indeed, the Tupamaros and others in the Uruguayan left chose which facet of US cultural and political ideas they would appropriate or reject for their benefit. Thus, despite anti-US government rhetoric, MLN-T members rarely seemed to thoughtlessly reject an idea or product solely demonstrated that the majority of the country agreed with easing restrictions on abortion. Vázquez’s veto further came as a surprise to many feminists as the president had nominated an unprecedented number of women to his cabinet, even in areas usually assigned to men such as ministries of defense and the interior. See Diana Cariboni, “Uruguay: Women Breaking Out of Political Corset,” Inter Press Service News Agency, May 28, 2009. http://ips news.net/news.asp?idnews=47012/.


because of its affiliation with the US or capitalism. As one US radical contended, “Uruguay is possibly more like the US than any other Latin American country.” As my research reveals, many members of the Tupamaros had no qualms about expressing admiration for both Che Guevara and James Bond, two men seemingly on different sides of the ideological spectrum.

Unlike other more doctrinaire leftist groups, the Tupamaros’ struggle for the betterment of Uruguay did not necessarily require them to reject everything associated with the United States and Europe. Therefore, if supporting neoliberal economic policies benefited the primarily middle class Uruguay and helped them to win the centrist vote, then the Tupamaros would see no reason to cling to strict Marxist economic models that could, in the estimation of some, harm the country. Proving the complexities of economic policies and ideologies in Uruguay, after the election of Vázquez and the passage of an amendment making water management the responsibility of the state, Uruguayans celebrated leftist victories with an increase in consumption and increased leisure. For example, travel agency manager Juan Ihno Gruber noted that after the election of Vázquez Uruguayans began to book more vacations. He argued, “Even though people have the same difficulties, just the fact that they have hope makes them consume more.” Thus, middle class consumption in Uruguay did not necessarily decrease because of the election of leftists. Furthermore, while some from the Uruguayan left express concern about their government’s policies, evidence indicates that Uruguay’s free market policies during the last six years have increased the country’s economic growth. Under Vázquez’s government Uruguay’s agricultural based economy grew at a rate of seven percent annually. However, the Tupamaros’ support of neoliberal policies has led some to assert the familiar criticism that the Tupamaros favor nationalism and their country’s interests over an international Marxist movement.

The Tupamaros as Nationalists

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25 Luxner, “Uruguay is the Latest South American Country to Veer Left.”


Although for some it seemed contradictory, the Tupamaros conceptualized their politics as inspired by international movements as well as their own national history. While the group wanted to create “many Vietnams” they also focused on Uruguay’s history and national heroes.\(^\text{28}\) Thus, my research indicates that transnational historical actors such as the Tupamaros can also maintain deep nationalist roots. While the MLN-T supported an international socialist movement, they also supported a nationalistic rhetoric and espoused the popular refrain throughout Uruguay of their country’s exceptional nature. Thus, the idea that Uruguay contained more “educated” and “civilized” citizens than the rest of Latin America influenced group members to believe that their organization practiced superior warfare techniques, tempered by a higher respect for human life. In turn, many in the US left believed in the overall technical and structural superiority of the Tupamaros when compared with other Latin American guerrilla groups.\(^\text{29}\)

Ironically, the revolutionaries that many Tupamaros admired also disdained nationalistic rhetoric as it deviated from the larger struggle of international Marxist transformation. Che Guevara, an inspiration for many in the Tupamaros, seemed to support a different and more traditional Marxist conception of the international nature of revolution. According to Guevara, imperialism was a world system that could only be defeated in a global confrontation.\(^\text{30}\) Guevara also hoped for a proletarian internationalism populated by proletarian armies. Guevara’s call for an international proletarian army in the countryside deviated from the realities of the often nationalistic, middle class Tupamaros. Indeed, the Tupamaros often pointed to their distinctive urban situation and their need to respond most immediately to the increasingly authoritarian Uruguayan state. Thus, while the MLN-T supported internationalism and forged connection with other radicals, the middle class urban Tupamaros reacted first and foremost to their specific repression within Uruguay.

**Urban Versus Rural Guerrillas**

The Tupamaros implemented urban guerrilla warfare in large part because of their country’s unique terrain and demographics. The notion that the MLN-T achieved exemplary success as urban


\(^\text{29}\) For more on this phenomenon see Chapter Two.

guerrillas earned them admiration from revolutionaries throughout the world. Although the question of what sort of transnational relationship guerrillas in the countryside formed with other radicals has still not been answered, evidence presented in this dissertation indicates personal connections and communication between radicals in urban areas in Uruguay and the US. Bringing together seemingly disparate sources sheds light on the complex web of previously unexplored connections between the US and Uruguay. My research also indicates that Uruguayans did not only communicate with US activists but forged connections with Canadians and others throughout the world.  

Although scholars have more extensively explored the history of rural guerrillas in comparison to their urban counterparts, there remains significant work to be done concerning all types of guerrilla movements in Latin America. One unexamined topic even within the study of rural guerrilla movements concerns how militants communicated and established links of solidarity with other revolutionaries. How and to what extent did urban and rural guerrillas participate in a transnational discourse remain poorly understood. Only recently have scholars begun to examine the topic. While evidence indicates a relationship between leftists in the US and Uruguay, the nature of the connections between the Latin American left and European activists remain unknown. Even aspects of Cuban influence on the politics and culture of not only US radicals but leftists throughout Latin America proves rich for historical inquiry. Indeed, more historical research should be done to examine how groups with sometimes dissimilar agendas forged transnational alliances throughout Latin America, Europe and the US during the Cold War.

Although important works have emerged concerning the experience of female guerrillas, historians still need to explore more profoundly the discontent and gendered representation of Latin American militants. My work contributes to the understanding of these critical topics through a 

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31 For example, the Toronto based organization, Grupo de Apoyo a la Resistencia Uruguay (GARU) or Group for the Support of the Uruguayan Resistance focused primarily on leftist resistance and examined issues of class and the Uruguayan economy. The majority of the members of GARU originated from Uruguay and immigrated to North America in order to escape the dictatorship. GARU, Banda Oriental, no. 1 (September 1974). NACLA 1. See also the Toronto based, Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Uruguay (CDHRU), “Objectives,” no. 17 (October 1976). NACLA 5.


34 See for example Lorraine Bayard de Volo, Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs: Gender Identity Politics in Nicaragua, 1979-1999 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Karen Kampwirth, Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution:
discussion of the treatment of incarcerated Tupamaras, their representation within US leftist movements and their place in the Tupamaro hierarchy. Thus, taking into account issues of culture and sexuality offers a more multifaceted understanding of the gendered experiences of female militants in guerrilla movements. Indeed, future research about women in guerrilla movements should also consider how issues of culture, representation and sexuality shaped the experiences of the female militant.

More scholarly work should be done to explore how issues of race influenced urban and rural guerrilla movements in Latin America. My research indicates that transnational alliances and acts of solidarity occurred between African American activists and the Uruguayan left. Indeed, by claiming that the black civil rights struggle was “their struggle” many leftist Uruguayans consciously created a hemispheric solidarity with activists in the United States. However, besides Cuba, little is known about the connections between the US civil rights movement and leftists in Latin America. Focusing on the perspective of Latin American historical actors, this dissertation demonstrates that the US civil rights movement had an important impact on the activism and imagination of the Tupamaros as well as the greater Uruguayan left.

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In a 1994 article about the state of Latin American history after the end of the Cold War historian Florencia Mallon lamented, “It is not an easy time for scholars who work on Latin America.” According to Mallon, the emergence of governments that supported free markets, the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990 and disillusionment with the Cuban government as a coveted model of socialism represented just a few of many examples of the unraveling of important and inspirational historical narratives for Latin American historians. While these narratives have come undone in many ways, I


See Greg Grandin’s Empire’s Workshop: Latin America, the United States and the Rise of the New Imperialism (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006) and Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) for works that include race in the examination of the Latin American left and the Cold War.

contend that rejecting the rigid framework of Cold War politics also offers a whole new way of conceptualizing Latin American history. Indeed, by using new sources and variant approaches, historians are now able to explore previously marginalized historical actors and events in Latin America during the Cold War. It is my sincere hope that this dissertation contributes to an alternative narrative of US-Latin American relations and that it provides a better understanding of the complexities of revolutionary groups that have been misunderstood or wrongly classified in simplistic Cold War binaries.

The Tupamaros show that Latin American guerrilla groups during the Cold War did more than take sides in a battle of Soviet Union versus US ideologies. The MLN-T, refusing to limit themselves to dichotomous categories, created homegrown and unique forms of revolution. They conceptualized changing Uruguayan society on their own terms, without worrying what “-ism” they supported in the process. Despite Cold War narratives that forced Latin America into impenetrable ideological and political boundaries, my research reveals that the Tupamaros allied with and sometimes expressed admiration for US activists. These connections show the existence of rarely explored, non-paternalistic alliances of solidarity between Latin American and US historical actors. Indeed, the Uruguayan left and the Tupamaros participated in a transnational network of movements and individuals determined to incite radical change on both a national and international level. Beyond their willingness to connect with leftists in the US, the Tupamaros have helped to create new definitions of the left in Latin America. These complex and at times contradictory definitions do not replicate conventional Cold War models. Instead, the new left in Uruguay demonstrates not only a willingness to integrate multiple ideologies into their politics, but a rare ability to self-reflect on both their mistakes and successes.

The ability of the Tupamaros to reflect on their flaws comes in part from the years MLN-T members spent in prison, tortured by a government determined to enact its own rigid and radical ideologies. Resolved not to repeat the mistakes of the past, the Tupamaros survived terrible traumas in prison and emerged with a creative political plan. Indeed, participating in electoral solutions allowed for the Tupamaros to achieve large scale political triumph within just a few decades of their release from prison. Thus, Tupamaro victories occurred in large part because of the group’s willingness to learn from the rigid ideologies of the Cold War. The Tupamaros now seem to understand that little positive change can be accomplished in a world divided into absolutes. Such ideological flexibility and political adaptability has allowed MLN-T members to occupy government and institutional positions that once supported their repression. Only because of the Tupamaros’ ability to integrate various ideologies and
tactics in their politics was the group able to transform definitions of revolution, democracy and the left in Uruguay.

In the preface to his novel The Devil and Miss Prym, Brazilian author Paulo Coelho complicates the struggle between polar opposites (in this case “good” and “evil”) to show that at times we must all make difficult decisions and perform a balancing act between two seemingly irreconcilable poles. Coelho writes, “When we least expect it, life sets us a challenge to test our courage and willingness to change; at such a moment, there is no point in pretending that nothing has happened or in saying that we are not yet ready. The challenge will not wait.”\(^\text{37}\) The Tupamaros constantly faced challenges that demanded immediate resolution. Indeed, almost daily since the 1960s they have had to wrestle with the dilemma of how to define themselves as well as finding the best mechanisms to create a more equitable Uruguay. The current electoral success of the Tupamaros proves that while revolutions may wax or wane, reflecting on the memory and meaning of the struggle remains an essential part of the left’s ever evolving history. The Tupamaros demonstrate that only through constant reinvention can revolution survive.

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Lindsey Churchill received her BA and MA in Women’s Studies from the University of South Florida. She has published articles in Latin American Perspectives, NeoAmericanist and Lilith: A Feminist History Journal as well as a book chapter entitled “What is it? Difference, Darwin and the Victorian Freak Show” in the recently published Descent of Darwin: Evolutionary Visions of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Transatlantic Culture.