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The Uruguayan '68: Student Unrest and Breakdown of Democracy

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Abstract: In 1968 in Uruguay, as in many countries all over the world, a student movement broke up, impulsed by the high school students and joined by university students. It began in April as a claim against an increase in the price of the bus ticket and for a better budget dedicated to education. In a context of deep economic and social crisis, these demonstrations of unrest were common. But the increasing violence of the demonstrators, the radicalization of the student collective actions and the systematization of armed repression changed its nature during the austral winter. The proclamation of the state of emergency restraining the individual liberties and several student's deaths by the police are maybe the strongest symbols of this violence, which kept increasing until the *coup d'état* in 1973. In order to propose a general overview of the Uruguayan '68, this paper will expose the global and national contexts as well as the research field on the subject. Afterward, it will focus on the local scale to present a brief account of the events. It will finally consider some opening reflections about the relation between the students and media. Based on some of our own research, we intend to propose the idea of an informational field as an object of study, as a way to consider the encounter and struggle of multiple protagonists for the construction of representations of the students' protest. Particularly in 1968, this also implies contemplate transnational circulations of information that articulate local and global scales.

Keywords: Uruguay; Student protest; Global Sixties; 1968.

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1. Introduction: Global Sixties, New Left and youth culture

Trying to understand and analyze the '68 movements that broke out all over the world, in all the continents and nearly simultaneously, brings us to take into account the international context, and to consider this particular year as the climax of the «Long Sixties» – from the late 50's to the middle 70's. During the Cold War, this long cycle of protests, political unrest and cultural mutations improved the political and diplomatic relationships between the two powers, but increased the tensions on the cultural and political levels in the countries of the so-called «Third World» (Brands,

2010; Grandin, 2004; Joseph and Spenser, 2008, Calandra and Franco, 2012). The Cuban revolution of 1959 boosted this tendency, mostly in the subcontinent, and its influence was strengthened by the foundation of the *Organización Latinoamericana de Solidaridad* (OLAS – Latin American Organization of Solidarity) in 1967 and the first Tricontinental Conference in 1966, during which Cuba took the lead of the Third World and anti-imperialist movement (Zolov, 2016; Marchesi, 2017). The Vietnam War is also a key event of this period, drawing international attention and awakening a vast movement of solidarity. We can also mention the impact of the Bay of Pigs invasion, the missile crisis, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert, Che Guevara and then Martin Luther King. At a more regional level, the *coups d'état* in Brazil (1964) and Argentina (1966) and the United States' intervention in the Dominican Republic (1965) contributed to the political and social unrest in Latin America.

These «Long Sixties» are generally considered, from a political point of view, the moment of disruption of the New Left, which progressively «came to break the traditional domination that socialists and communists had held in the ideological and political spheres» (Rey Tristán, 2006, p. 57). All these emerging New Left organizations, despite their diversity, could be gathered below the same «aspirations for social transformation through new forms of action and mobilization» (Ibid.), influenced by the «foco» theory and the profuse debate around the «ways of the revolution» that the guerrilla had been promoting as the best way to complete the anti-imperialist revolution.[1] Jeremy Suri (2003), in an attempt to propose a global analysis of the period, highlighted the emergence of a «language of dissent».

We can associate the emergence of the New Left with the emergence of youth as an active actor in political and social struggles, which occurred both in the public and private spheres. As noticed Jean-Paul Sartre after his trip to Cuba in 1960, the most scandalous element of the Cuban revolution was to «put the children in power» (1960). This process of construction of a generational group, with its own cultural products and behavioral habits, can be partly explained by the post-war «baby boom», the new demographic weight of youth, and the massive access to secondary and superior studies. In many countries, educational structures were not adapted, as in Montevideo or in Paris, where the Faculty of Nanterre, an ensemble of concrete buildings, was quickly constructed in the suburbs to transfer part of the overpopulated Sorbonne. Mass media and an accelerated circulation of news and images equally encourage a vast diffusion of cultural products (rock music), symbols (barricades), figures (Che Guevara, Mao, Fidel Castro…) or fashions (long hair for men, mini skirt for women). This has undoubtedly contributed to the internationalization of the youth culture and of the '68 movements. Another characteristic of this youth of the sixties was the consciousness of its role in the struggles of the time, as remembers Gonzalo Varela, high school student during the '68 movement in Montevideo: «there was a

[1] It should be noted, however, that some academics now discuss the definition and the relevance of the concept of New Left, as opposed to an «old» one. See for instance, about the Uruguayan '68, Markarian, V. (2011). «Sobre viejas y nuevas izquierdas. Los jóvenes comunistas uruguayos y el movimiento estudiantil de 1968». *Secuencia,* 81, p.161-186; Zolov, E. (2008). «Expanding our Conceptual Horizons: The Shift from an Old to a New Left in Latin America». *A Contracorriente*, 5(2), North Carolina, p.47-73.

Espacio, Tiempo y Educación, v. 8, n. 2, julio-diciembre / july-december 2021, pp. 89-103.
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sense of historical change and of the prominence of a generation that often felt it had a real influence on the evolution of events» (Varela Petito, 2002, p. 11).

This global context explains why we will not try in this paper to determine in which country the '68 movement first began, or if Uruguayan students were influenced by others around the globe. We prefer to avoid the chain-reaction pattern, and favor the idea of the existence of multiple centers of potential social and youth unrest, boosted by their integration in a complex network of transnational circulations (global, but not homogeneous). We insisted in this introduction on the international aspects, but the national or local context made each movement peculiar, and sometimes clearly different.[2] The study of the '68 movements must therefore include several scales of analysis. That's why after these general considerations, we will concentrate our focus on the national scale, in order to briefly present the Uruguayan context of the sixties as well as the historiography of the Uruguayan '68. Only then will we deal with the local scale, proposing an account of the events that focus on Montevideo.[3] Finally, we will expand again our perspective in order to offer some reflections about transnational circulations and representations based on our own researches, mostly centered on Montevideo and Paris.

2. Uruguay between generalized crisis, authoritarianism and political radicalization

Uruguay was experiencing a deep crisis since the late 1950s, which intensified throughout the 1960s to include political, economic, social, even ethical and moral matters.[4] At some point, people were aware of this crisis, and Uruguayan intellectuals of the «Generación crítica» [Critical Generation] tried to analyze it (Espeche, 2016). But it seems that it mostly provoked surprise and lack of understanding. Uruguayan culture was based on the perception of itself as the «Swiss of America», a thriving and peaceful country, an exception in the regional context. The *batllismo* imposed discussion and negotiation in the settlement of social conflicts, progressive social policies, wealth distribution, investments in education[5]. Before the crisis, economic prosperity was a consequence of the two world wars and the Korean War (1950-1953), which led to an increase in the price of raw materials. Indeed, the Uruguayan economy was (and is still) based on agriculture, meat production and its derivatives, mainly wool and leather, and the international demand for them skyrocketed. This relative affluence even allowed projects of Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI).[6]

[2] That's why the national scale is still relevant in the academic studies about '68 movements, even if the analysis of transnational and global aspects shed light on new problematics and features.

[3] Uruguay is a perfect example of urban macrocephaly: half of the population was (and is still) living in the capital, at that time the only university center of the country.

[4] For a global review on this period of crisis, see Alonso Eloy, R. and Demasi, C. (1986). *Uruguay 1958-1968. Crisis y estancamiento.* Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental; Nahum, B., Frega, A., Maronna, M. and Trochon, Y. (1994). *El fin del Uruguay liberal (1959-1973).* Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda oriental.

[5] José Batlle y Ordoñez was President of Uruguay from 1903 to 1907, and from 1911 to 1915.

[6] Policy whose main purpose is replacing the importations with local productions, in order to develop the domestic industry and to be less dependent on the other countries.

However, the restoration of peace made it come to a quick end, initiating a period of high economic instability, characterized in particular by a galloping inflation. The latter reached an annual average of 60% over the period 1962-1968, with a maximum of 136% in 1967 (Alonso Eloy and Demasi, 1986, p. 93). In addition, the *Partido Blanco*, a traditional conservative party, which became head of state for the first time in 1958[7], initiated a radical change in Uruguay's economic policy by aligning with the IMF guidelines, provoking a devaluation of the Uruguayan peso and a liberalization of trade, which was detrimental to the underdeveloped industry of this small country that had so far been applying strong protectionism. The *blanco* government couldn't reverse the tendency, and the economic difficulties along with the social dissatisfaction kept increasing.

The choice of a collegial presidency in 1952, the election of the *Partido Blanco* in 1958 and the return of a unique and stronger presidency with the *Partido Colorado* in 1967 all reflect the failure of both the traditional parties and the institutional structures to resolve the crisis. On the other hand, the divisions and redefinitions of the left parties can also be seen as an illustration or a consequence of the political and social changes. After the *Partido Colorado* came back to power, under the pressure of restoring economic stability and social order, authoritarianism quickly became the way to rule the country. One of Jorge Pacheco Areco's first decisions, as soon as he became President after the unexpected death of Oscar Gestido, was to dismantle several left organizations and newspapers that had supported the OLAS statements in favor of the armed struggle. The crisis of the sixties resulted in a gradual disconnection between the population and the Executive, increasingly composed of industrialists and technicians who were not very concerned about the country's realities. The tradition of dialogue was gradually being replaced by authoritarian government practices, amongst which police repression, censorship, and the use of the *Medidas Prontas de Seguridad* (state of emergency) that limited individual liberties and rights and allowed the President to govern by decrees.

Associated with this multifaceted crisis and integrated in the «Global Sixties», we can distinguish a long «cycle of protests» that covers the 1960s and early 1970s, until the 1973 *coup d'état*. In this context the '68 movement can be defined as a «short cycle of protests» (Markarian, 2019). During this long cycle, as in many countries, new actors of social struggles appeared, as well as new forms of struggle that tended to become more radical and increasingly oriented towards violent and sometimes clandestine actions, such as those of armed guerrilla warfare. Although this protest cycle is defined according to local characteristics and events, it is directly linked to regional and global processes.

The trade union world is getting organized. In 1964, the *Convención Nacional de Trabajadores* (CNT – Workers National Convention), which was set up as a coordinating body for several trade unions and organizations, started gathering. The following year, the *Congreso del Pueblo* (the People's Congress) was convened, with the participation of unions, student organizations, cooperatives and religious organizations. All the delegates were working on a vast program aimed at proposing

[7] Before that, the other traditional party, the *Partido Colorado*, monopolized the presidency during nearly a century.

Espacio, Tiempo y Educación, v. 8, n. 2, julio-diciembre / july-december 2021, pp. 89-103.
e-ISSN: 1698-7802

solutions to the country's crisis. In 1966, the statutes and program of the *Congreso del Pueblo* were approved, transforming the coordinating body into a trade union center. The *Frente Amplio*, a coalition of left-wing parties and organizations formed for the 1971 elections, was in line with the communist-dominated CNT. During 1968, while the key role of youth was even more prominent, trade unions and workers joined the movement, regularly declaring strikes and occupying factories. As the high school movement began in the most modest districts of the capital, a strong solidarity often emerged between students and workers.

But unrest was also spreading across the provinces, symbolized by the action of the *Unión de Trabajadores Azucareros de Artigas* (UTAA), the union of sugar cane workers (*cañeros*) in Bella Unión, in the north of the country. They carried out several marches to Montevideo (five between 1964 and 1970). One of them allowed the *cañeros* to participate in the May 1st demonstrations in the capital, one of the milestones in the Uruguayan '68 movement, which resulted in harsh repression. The *cañeros* and their frugal way of life greatly influenced other Uruguayan left-wing organizations. The leader of their union, the socialist Raúl Sendic, became in 1964 the founder of the guerrilla group of the guerrilla group *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional* (MLN – National Liberation Movement), also called Tupamaros.[8] In its early years, the activity of this organization advocating armed struggle mainly consisted in obtaining weapons and financing. The MLN gained some importance precisely after the unrest of 1968, when many young people, disappointed by the end of the student movement, joined its ranks. The joint action of the police and the armed forces in the repression of the guerrilla warfare in the early 1970s led to the gradual dismantling of the organization, most of whose members had fled or were in prison at the time of the *coup d'état*.

The youth was also a new key political actor of the decade but, like other Latin American countries, Uruguay had a strong tradition of student activism (Van Aken, 1990). Active since the end of the 19th century, it has several constant characteristics: demand for student participation in the management of the University and university autonomy, strong anti-imperialism, reflection on the role of the University in society, and establishment of relationships with the working class. The Córdoba University Reform of 1918 had a very strong impact on the other side of the *Río de la Plata*. Beforehand, the *Congreso Internacional de Estudiantes Americanos* that took place in Montevideo in 1908 and, in 1917, the creation of the *Centro Ariel* promoting the reformist ideas and the enactment of a new Constitution incorporating the first steps towards university autonomy, played an equally substantial role in Uruguay.[9] Student unionism gained influence from the founding in 1929 of the *Federación de*

[8] The MLN was the main guerrilla organization in Uruguay, but several small clandestine groups were also praising the armed revolution, and violent act were as well perpetrated by extreme right individuals or groups. About the minor revolutionary left-wing organizations, see Rey Tristán, E. (2006). *A la vuelta de la esquina.* op. cit.

[9] The *Centro Ariel* was created in 1917, in order to gather the students who acted during the movement of the same year, and worked as a center of reflection and discussion about the local and regional problems of the time, the role of the University in the society, and educational questions. The center has been active till 1931. See the review: http://historiasuniversitarias.edu.uy/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Centro-Ariel-version-final.pdf.

Estudiantes Universitarios del Uruguay (FEUU – Federation of Uruguay's College Students) that coordinated the action of the federations of the different Faculties of the *Universidad de la República*, unique and state center of study. In 1951, a new Constitution endorsed the principle of the University's autonomy, but it was in 1958 that, despite repression, the student movement won its greatest victory: the promulgation of the *Ley Orgánica*, which established direct student representation in all the University's collegial bodies, and the University's autonomy. It can therefore be seen that, while the 1968 student movement in Uruguay was undoubtedly a landmark event, it coexisted with other essential moments in the students' quest for new rights. It is actually quite frequent to read or listen that «Uruguayans had their '68 in '58». We can however distinguish some new characteristics of the '68 student movement. We most often refer to university students, but there, the leaders were the high school students, mainly from modest neighborhoods, who were massively entering the educational system (lots of them were the first of their family to reach this educational level). Another distinctive feature is the radicalization of student organizations, in which extreme left-wing groups progressively replaced the traditional communist forces and those in favor of the *Third Position*. We could also mention, at some point, the predominance of the spontaneity of the movement, during which the powerful and well organized *Coordinadora de Estudiantes de Secundaria del Uruguay* (CESU, relationed with the Communist Party) and FEUU lost the control of this revolt.

3. Review of the historiography and new perspectives in the field of cultural history

Academic researches focusing on the Uruguayan '68 which we will briefly present below are limited in number, moreover if you compare them with the abundant literature, for instance, about the Tupamaros organization. It should however be noted that this particular year is often considered, in Uruguayan historiography, a key moment of rupture in the deterioration process of the social and political climate that led to the 1973 *coup d'état*, referred to as «democratic path to dictatorship» by the Uruguayan academic Álvaro Rico (2005, pp. 44-60). This explains why the Uruguayan '68 is often included in broader issues and chronologies that seek to analyze the pre-dictatorial period and the long decade of crisis we have described before.[10]

The first books on the Uruguayan '68 were published just after the events. Journalists Roberto Copelmayer and Diego Díaz conducted several thematic group interviews with high school activists (1968).[11] This testimonial work therefore shows the key role of high school students in the 1968 movement in Uruguay, while in most other countries this role was embodied by university students. Carlos Bañales

[10] See for instance Varela Petito, G. (1988). *De la república liberal al estado militar. Uruguay 1968-1973*. Montevideo: Ediciones Nuevo Mundo; Cores, H. (1999). *Uruguay hacia la dictadura. 1968-1973*. Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental.

[11] Although not focused on the 1968 movement, the review *Cuadernos de Enciclopedia Uruguaya* «La voz de los estudiantes», published that year, bears witness to the interest in student militancy at that time.

Espacio, Tiempo y Educación, v. 8, n. 2, julio-diciembre / july-december 2021, pp. 89-103.
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and Enrique Jara (1968), also journalists, attempted a first analysis of the student movement, placing it in the context of the crisis Uruguay was experiencing at the time, and based on numerous figures that shed light on certain demographic aspects and problems related to the academic world (enrollment explosion, lack of resources, etc.).

During the dictatorship, there is an almost complete lack of studies on the issue, mainly because of the muzzling of the University and the press. Moreover, yet in 1969, being caught with some incriminating documents was considered dangerous and a potential help to the repressive forces (Varela Petito, 2002, p. 11). A second historiographical period arose with the return of democracy, and went on until the beginning of this century. The writings produced then combined an analysis of the 1968 movement with autobiographical accounts, as the authors were as well actors of the '68 movement. Gonzalo Varela Petito (2002) returned to his memories of militancy as a student of the IAVA, one of the main high schools in the city center, adjacent to the University's central building, and one of the nerve centers of student unrest, providing – along with Copelmayer and Díaz (1968) – one of the few reflections on militancy in Uruguayan high schools. His work can be divided into two parts: the presentation of the militant life in the IAVA and an account of the '68 movement, based both on documents and his own memory. Jorge Landinelli (1989) was a student leader in the communist wing of the FEUU, so his analysis of Uruguayan '68 focuses on the university movement and on the student federations. He proposes a study structured as Gonzalo Varela's, with a presentation of the militant structures, and a description of the '68 movement. Hugo Cores (1997), an adult at this time, was an activist in the CNT. As he explains in the introduction of his book, the goal of this work was to construct knowledge about the worker movement history, in order to help its rebuilding in the post-dictatorship period. He then includes in his account of 1968 the positions and actions of the workers and trade unions. We can thus see that the analyses and testimonies of the Uruguayan '68 clearly offer a look from political organizations,[12] and reject any idea of generational conflict and cultural revolution, associated with the European and North American movements. Students do not revolt against the university or professors, but against the government's policy, guided by a «university responsibility» that would come from the experience of co-governance. Solidarity between students and workers, particularly visible in working-class neighborhoods, is also emphasized. It would therefore be a very politicized movement associated with a rather austere and serious conception of revolutionary practices, in accordance with Che Guevara's figure of the *hombre nuevo* [new man].

However, recent researches have opened up new insights into the field of cultural history. We will mainly refer to the study of Vania Markarian, *Uruguay, 1968. Student Activism from Global Counterculture to Molotov Cocktails* (2017). It highlights the existence of juvenile cultures, groups defined by their belonging to the same generation and with their own system of values and cultural references. During the Uruguayan '68, this manifests itself, for example, in conflicts between university authorities and students tending to occupy spaces, or in forms of struggle that require

[12] Uruguayan historiography generally gives a central place to political organizations, whether they are political parties or trade unions.

the strength and agility of youth, such as «flash» demonstrations. On the other hand, activism was often associated with cultural practices, such as music festivals. The *Unión de la Juventud Comunista* (UJC) is thus known for organizing concerts and balls for its members. The playful and counter-cultural aspect is therefore not absent from the 1968 student movement, during which many posters (mostly created by Fine Arts students), graffitis and humorous slogans appeared alongside the barricades. High school students also organized *contracursos* [counterclasses], usually given outside the school by volunteer teachers who dealt with various issues outside the academic curriculum. Finally, not only does Vania Markarian's work decipher the Uruguayan '68 at a national scale, but it also inserts it in a vast network of circulations of fashions and cultural products, coming mainly from the United States. Her book then shows how young left-wing militants combine their ideologies and strong Latin Americanism with cultural norms and references as the Beatles or the long hair fashion.

4. Account of the events: the story of an escalation of violence[13]

It is impossible to propose in a few pages a complete and detailed story about these months that radically changed the course of Uruguay's recent history. The density of the events, the multiplicity of the actors and voices as well as the diversity of the places constrain us to choose and admit that this story will be partial and incomplete. We will prioritize the students of the Uruguayan capital, and develop key moments that allow us to underline how a common protest quickly became a symbol of the authoritarianism, of the rupture between a state and the people it supposedly represented.

In the light of the above presented context, the emergence of the student and trade union movement in 1968 was not exceptional. It actually began as any social mobilization, quite common during these times of crisis. It became a significant moment in the history of social movements in Uruguay because of the escalation of the violence that characterized it. The high school students began to express their dissatisfaction right after the beginning of the classes in April, owing to the announcement of an increase in the price of bus tickets and an even higher price for the students living outside Montevideo's center, discriminating those who resided in the peripheral and modest areas. Led by the CESU, the movement initially developed in the working class districts of Montevideo, through peaceful practices such as sit-ins. Teachers' unions were also acting to obtain more resources for education, anticipating the announcement of the annual state budget in September. Both secondary and higher education had to face an explosion in the number of students, who could not be accommodated under satisfying conditions due to the infrastructure. These were regular claims, and at that point, the mobilization looked like any other. But the First of May demonstration which was joined by the *cañeros* suffered an unusual repression, which can now be seen as a forerunner of the further events. During the first weeks of May, most of the high schools were occupied or

[13] The chronological description of the events is based on the existent bibliography presented above.

Espacio, Tiempo y Educación, v. 8, n. 2, julio-diciembre / july-december 2021, pp. 89-103.
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closed and the juvenile militancy started to become more aggressive, dense and unified. At the same time, the CESU was looking for a negotiated solution with the authorities of Montevideo, and the *Guardia Metropolitana* (Metropolitan Police Force) began to help with the repression.[14]

The events went a first further during the first half of June. The FEUU officially joined the movement on June 6th to demand the repayment of a government debt from several student institutions. After a meeting on the University esplanade, which was joined by the high school students, a march began on *18 de julio*, the main avenue in the city center. 38 caliber shots by the police wounded several people, and many students were taken into custody. On the high school side, the movement started to politicize and radicalize, and continued despite CESU's call to end it. If police violence had increased, so had student action: occupation of schools, increasingly frequent «flash» demonstrations, barricades, stone throwing against buses and Molotov cocktails, were becoming widespread, at the same time as the movement's spreading to different areas of the city center. Radicalization is also visible in the University, where there is a retreat of communists in the FEUU, to the benefit of extreme left-wing groups more favorable to direct confrontation with security forces. On June 12th, the CNT, the FEUU and the CESU join to launch a call for general mobilization on the University's esplanade as a reaction to the repression of the 6th. Despite the request to stop the demonstration formulated by the Government and passed on by the University authorities, the students spontaneously decided to occupy the streets and confront the *Guardia*. That led to the establishment of the *Medidas Prontas de Seguridad* the following day, which restricted individual freedoms (right to strike, right of assembly, etc.), and entailed censorship and the militarization of civil servants (striking workers were considered deserters, which is why they had to report to the military courts). The government also announced a price and wage freeze, which only exacerbated the discontent of workers who were seeing their living standard deteriorate day by day.

Disturbances were surging on a daily basis during the month of June: violent demonstrations, police repression, workers' strikes, attacks of the Government against the University's authorities. The initial one-time demands gave way to a denunciation of the Government's policy and police repression, calling for the release of detained students. Street struggle technics were evolving equally, and university students took the lead. Thus, around mid-August, a new level of violence was reached, getting to a point of no return. On August 9th and under the pretext of an investigation linked to the kidnapping of Ulises Pereira Reverbel (the director of the UTE, the public electricity company) by the MLN, a police intervention was organized in several centers of the University, without any previous agreement with the university authorities, and ended up violating its autonomy. On the 12th, a policeman fatally shot and wounded communist student Líber Arce, who died two days later. He was the first student martyr on a list that would keep growing in the following years. The march at his funeral is described as one of the largest

[14] The *Guardia Metropolitana* was a national police force with special training for dangerous tasks and civilian repression, known to be more militarized and more violent than the common police forces.

gatherings of that time. These two events – the police intervention in the University's premises and the assassination of Líber Arce – marked a definitive break between the government and student activists and confirmed the impossibility of dialogue.

The movement continues. On September 20th, an intervention by the police – justified by the supposed existence of a subversive plan organized by students and workers – left two other victims among the students: Hugo de los Santos and Susana Pintos, who was trying to evacuate his wounded comrade while the police was blocking the University's access to ambulances. Both had recently been affiliated with the Communist Youth, precisely as a reaction to Líber Arce's death. These two students, as many others who joined the UJC at this moment, show that the communists «capitalized on a rebellious spirit that had quickly overflowed traditional forms and spaces of protest» (Markarian, 2019, p. 135). Back then, the police was equipped with pellet guns from the United States that had been training Uruguayan law-enforcement troops for a few years and provided them with weapons. Fearing a further outbreak of student violence, the government ordered the suspension of classes and the closure of all schools and universities until October, 15th. The repression, together with this decision (most of the student activities and meetings were taking place in the education centers), gradually put an end to student unrest, but the violent resolution of the conflict was caused a deep and lasting rupture between the government and part of the population. Some of the young people, disappointed with the end of the movement, joined the Tupamaros organization.

5. Some reflections about transnational circulation and mediatic representations

As we mentioned in the introduction, student movements are clearly conditioned both by local and national contexts, but are also shaped by a global youth culture and the reception, assimilation and adaptation of images, news and symbols from other parts of the world. We would like, therefore, to broaden the reflection and propose some elements of our own research about the relation between student unrest and media in Uruguay '68.[15] Although briefly, this is going to allow us to consider both the protest and its representations. By doing this, we can look critically at the written production that conditions the academic work and consider it as the result of a complex process that need to be historicize. Moreover, studying the interactions connecting students and media implies taking into account several scales of analysis and the insertion of the local with the global, through transnational networks of people, ideas and information. By «media», we mean here not only the emergent «mass media», but also other kind of written publications – weekly, literary journals or books – that are in other ways involved in the transnational circulation of information and the

[15] Our PhD research seek to analyze the transnational circulation of information and the representations of the French May in Uruguay. In a collective project coordinated by Vania Markarian and Gabriela González Vaillant, we studied the Uruguayan '68 by means of a database of protest events collected in the weekly *Marcha*: Gapenne, C. (2021). «Protesta estudiantil, medios de comunicación y opinión pública en torno al 68 uruguayo», in González Vaillant, G. and Markarian, V. (Eds.). *El río y las olas: ciclos de protesta estudiantil en Uruguay (1958, 1968, 1983, 1996)*. Montevideo: Udelar-AGU, p.55-85.

Espacio, Tiempo y Educación, v. 8, n. 2, julio-diciembre / july-december 2021, pp. 89-103.
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construction of representations of the student protest. It should be noted that the following presentation is thought as the starting point towards future research on the possibility of conceiving an informational field, in which several protagonists are engaged in dialogue and struggle for the construction of representations that produce political, social and cultural realities.

The first actor that we can mention is the «mass media», which proposes several kinds of information about local and international situations. It can be observed in editorials and opinion articles published in Uruguayan dailies in 1968 many views on students, youth and the University. It is striking that regardless of political tendencies – Uruguayan press is generally linked to parties – they emphasize on the intrinsic virtues of young people. Their violence, even if condemnable, is always explained by external factors: crisis of social, cultural and religious values, negative foreign influence, or university structure inappropriate to the new coordinate of labor market. These statements echo the discussions carried out in other fields such as the emergent sociology and generally integrate the local disruption of student unrest in the international context of youth mobilization. They sometimes highlight the difference between the situation in Europe or the United States and that of Latin America or the Third World, but still consider the global emergence of youth discontent. Both local and global dimensions also appear in the news published in the press. In an investigation on the left-wing weekly *Marcha*, we could see that during the mobilization peak of Uruguayan students, the journalistic writing tends to focus on the form of the protest – violence, number of protesters, presence of police – to the detriment of the students' claims. This will most probably be verified with the daily press. There, we can read as well international news, composed of international agencies cables. They are scarcely modified, due to the requirement of efficiency and novelty. The professional criteria for the agencies' journalists implies a narrative that focus on facts and on the legitimate voices of those who have access to the media: official *communiqués*, public declaration and speeches of politicians or union leaders.

Largely in reaction to the mass media and the representations that they produce emerged a myriad of alternative projects of «contrainformation» that show a great diversity of formats, temporalities, transnational networks, protagonists and goals. Journalists gradually give way to the voice of intellectuals, analysts, artists and, in the case of the French May, even the students themselves. In some sectors of the Uruguayan and Argentinian left,[16] the protest in France is often used as an example to think the local and regional realities, to learn from its error and conceive a revolutionary strategy. Many texts from Jean-Paul Sartre, Ernest Mandel or André Gorz are traduced and published.[17] At the same time, literary journals show several ways to reappropriate the «May slogans», incarnation of the encounter between

[16] To study the reception of the French May in Uruguay, we also consider journals and books from Argentina that was distributed in Montevideo.

[17] See for instance *Cuadernos de Marcha* (1968). «Los estudiantes», 15, July; Gorz, A., Mandel, E., Lettieri, A., Santi, P., Martinet, G. and Barjonet, A. (1969). *Francia 1968: ¿una revolución fallida?* Córdoba: Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente; Gorz, A., Vincent, J.-M., Mandel, E., Mazure, P. and Barthes, R. (1969). *París, mayo 1968. La prerrevolución francesa*. Buenos Aires: Tiempo Contemporáneo.

politics and art promoted by various artistic and literary *avant-garde* movements. As an example, it can be mentioned the Uruguayan provocative journal *Los Huevos del Plata*, which promoted new forms of expression such as the Postal Art or happenings and performance. In their thirteenth edition, they reproduce a selection of May slogans, disseminated over the pages and in dialogue with a large text about *spatialisme*, a poetic movement created in the sixties in France (1969, pp. 9-20).[18] We may as well allude to the appropriation of the cinematographic medium in militant sphere, where students emerge as a political subject. In relation to the audiovisual projects of *Marcha*, the '68 movement and the death of the student Líber Arce encouraged the need to «reorganize the narrative around shared matters» (Lacruz, 2016, p. 312). The film department of *Marcha* produced in 1969 the film *Líber Arce, liberarse*.[19] The same year, in the film festival organized by the Uruguayan weekly, were projected shootings about the French May, with an important role given to the student leaders. Here students are key protagonists in the alternative representations that these media promoted, associated to transnational networks of circulation of information that connected militants, academics and writers.

Finally, we can focus on the students, which are not passive receptors of the information and representations produced in the media. On the one hand, we can detect some reactions of Uruguayan students about foreign events and see how they can link it to their own local or regional situation. To many of them, Latin America and more generally the Third World has to be the place for the future revolution: they remain skeptical in front of the youth unrest in Europe and emphasize the influence of figures such as Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh or Mao. For instance, a Uruguayan student interviewed by a journalist of *Marcha* pointing out the similarities between the protest in Paris and Montevideo answered that «French are inspired by Che Guevara, and I don't know if you know that the Che is Latin American» (G.H.P., 1968, p. 8). This can explain that in Uruguay, until today, predominates a representation of the French May as a cultural movement, a romantic and «deathless» rebellion that was mostly seeking sexual liberation. It can be opposed to an image of the Uruguayan '68 as a true revolutionary moment: extremely politicized, violent, austere, with several martyrs, with urgent social and political stakes. On the other hand, not only the students were able to make their own interpretation of the events: they also showed their capacity to use the media and to establish their own communicational strategy. Media, even if criticized, often worked as an extension of the voice of the students to express their claims. This use of the mediatic system, in relation to other practices such as the assemblies, could consist of the dissemination of letters and statements in national media, which was mainly accessible to institutionalized student organizations as the FEUU. In the '68, however, the main organizations found themselves overrun by more radicalized groups. Other spaces of gathering and dialogue less formal also emerged, where new organizational forms were tried out. The communicational challenge and the need to gain the favors of the «public

[18] The May slogans come from Besançon, J. (1968). *Les murs ont la parole. Journal mural, mai 68*. Paris: Tchou Editeur.

[19] Wordplay in Spanish meaning «to free ourselves».

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opinion» led to other strategies such as leafleting or organizing meetings with workers.

This brief and summarized presentation seems useful to propose potential investigation lines in order to study the '68 student protest, in Uruguay and elsewhere. Examining the relationship between students and the media allows us to glimpse a space in which a multitude of protagonists, with their own tools and goals, try to influence the construction of representations of the movement. The local, the regional and the international are here closely articulated, confirming the need to think about the student protest taking into consideration different scales and the existence of extensive networks of transnational circulation of people, ideas and information.

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