

## Introduction: Actions, Ideas, and Emotions in the Construction of a Transnational Radicalism in the Southern Cone

In the late 1960s, the Uruguayan Enrique Lucas joined the urban guerilla organization *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Tupamaros* (Tupamaros National Liberation Movement, or MLN-T). In 1972, after several months in prison, Lucas went into exile in Allende's Chile, making use of a constitutional provision that enabled prisoners to leave the country. In Chile he participated in mobilizations organized by the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (Revolutionary Left Movement, or MIR). After the coup he fled to Argentina. Following a short stay in Cuba, Lucas participated as an MLN-T member in the activities conducted in Buenos Aires by the *Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria* (Revolutionary Coordination Board, or JCR), a coordinating body formed by members of his organization, Chile's MIR, Bolivia's *Ejército de Liberación Nacional Boliviano* (Bolivian National Liberation Army, or ELN), and Argentina's *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (People's Revolutionary Army, or ERP). However, amid a strong internal crisis in the MLN-T, Lucas decided to leave his organization and join Bolivian ELN militants who were planning an insurreccional campaign to demand the return of General Juan José Torres, who during his year as president of Bolivia (1970–1971) had built a left-wing government in alliance with peasant and mining sectors. In 1974 he crossed the border. There he met Graciela Rutilo Artes, an Argentine activist with whom he had a daughter. On April 2, 1976 Graciela was kidnapped, along with their daughter Carla and they were taken illegally to a clandestine detention center in Argentina. Five months later, Lucas was killed, along with a group of Bolivian guerrillas, in a clash with members of Bolivia's repressive forces in Cochabamba. Graciela was disappeared and is still missing today, and Carla was illegally appropriated by an Argentine military officer with whom she lived into her teenage years.<sup>1</sup>

Enrique Lucas' story is just one example among thousands that reveal the epic, violent, and dramatic dimensions that political struggles in Latin America's Southern Cone took on during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Lucas belonged to a generation of political activists that emerged in a context marked by increasing social protests, the rise of authoritarian regimes

(Brazil, 1964; Bolivia, 1966; Argentina, 1966; Bolivia, 1971; Uruguay, 1972–3; Chile, 1973; Argentina, 1976), and growing expectations fueled by the social alternatives opened up by the Cuban Revolution. This new political generation – composed primarily of young people, who in the late 1960s had not yet reached their thirties – challenged the traditional ways of doing politics and proposed new forms of social, political, and cultural mobilization. The activists of this “New Left” criticized the legalism and reformism of the communist and socialist parties – the parties of the traditional Left. They also proposed new, more radical methods, which they considered more effective for ensuring the social changes that, in their view, popular sectors demanded. Armed organizations gradually became the leading players in this wave of “New Left” movements that spread across the region and which are the subject of study of this investigation.<sup>2</sup>

This book examines the emergence, development, and demise of a network of organizations of young leftist militants in the Southern Cone, who in the late 1960s and early 1970s advocated organized political violence and transnational strategies as the only ways of achieving social change in their countries. The research conducted for this study traces the path taken by Argentine, Chilean, Uruguayan, and, to a lesser extent, Brazilian and Bolivian activists to develop a regional network of armed organizations. The exchanges among these organizations spanned more than ten years.

The origins of the organizations that participated in this network date back to the mid-1960s. In Argentina, the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (Revolutionary Workers' Party, or PRT), which would later become the ERP, was formed through the merging of the Trotskyist group Palabra Obrera (Workers' Word, or PO), which had participated in the intense urban labor struggles of the early 1960s, and the Frente Revolucionario Indoamericano Popular (Popular Indo-American Revolutionary Front, or FRIP), a Latin Americanist and Indigenist organization influenced by the ideas of Peruvian APRA leader Víctor Haya de la Torre, with influence in northern Argentina. Both organizations came together in their efforts to raise political awareness among sugar workers in the north, and in 1965 they came to an agreement that established the PRT. One of the leaders of the FRIP, Roberto Mario Santucho, prevailed as head of the new organization over Nahuel Moreno, the traditional leader of Argentine Trotskyism.<sup>3</sup> The Chilean MIR was formed that same year as the result of the coming together of various activists who were critical of the traditional (communist and socialist) Left and its commitment to electoral politics in Chile. These activists, who belonged to Trotskyist and anarchist sectors but were also from groups that had broken away from the communist and socialist parties, were for the most part trade unionists and students who saw social protest as the path to Chile's revolution. Although initially traditional Trotskyist sectors had a significant presence,

they were eventually replaced by a new generation of activists, as occurred in Argentina.<sup>4</sup> The Uruguayan Tupamaros were a small group created in January 1966 by various activists who for the most part had broken away from the Socialist Party, but also from the Communist Party and anarchist and minor left-wing groups. From 1962 to 1965, several of these activists had met in an informal group, which they called “the Coordinator,” with the aim of supporting the protests of sugarcane workers in northern Uruguay who were occupying land and demanding agrarian reform. This movement was headed by a young law student, Raul Sendic, a member of the Socialist Party who had gone up north to work with rural laborers and would later be the leader of the Tupamaros.<sup>5</sup>

Although initially small and with little awareness of each other, these and other groups gradually started to come together in meetings across the region. They began in Uruguay as a result of rising authoritarianism in neighboring Brazil and Argentina. Che Guevara’s Bolivia campaign in 1966 furthered these interactions, which were formalized in Chile under the Unidad Popular (Popular Unity, or UP) government, where a number of groups started to consider the possibility of creating a new regional organization. This idea eventually took form in the Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria, formed by Bolivia’s ELN, Chile’s MIR, Argentina’s ERP, and Uruguay’s MLN-T.

These coordination efforts reached their highest point in Buenos Aires in the period spanning from 1973 to 1976. With the coup d’état in Argentina in 1976, these organizations lost their last remaining “refuge” in the region. Following the harsh blows suffered as a result of the repressive actions of their governments, they tried to regroup during the transition to democracy in the 1980s and adapt to that new political context.

To understand the evolution that led these armed organizations to attempt a broad continental strategy, I will look at the convergence of these national movements through the critical events that defined this generation. I will do this through a multiple-scale approach, considering transnational, regional, and local developments, and will seek to gain insight into the numerous political and cultural processes on which this generation gradually built its political projects. In this way, I aim to contribute to three fields of study connected with the recent history of Latin America: the global 60s; the evolution of the Latin American Left; and the rise of authoritarianism in the Southern Cone.

### South America and the Global 60s

An extensive literature has discussed the implications that the global 60s had for the Left in different parts of the world. Most approaches agree that the 1960s opened up fresh possibilities for the emergence of a novel global

political movement called the New Left that challenged the political assumptions of the traditional Left. However, the main features of this new political movement have been a matter of debate around the world. While for Jeremi Suri, the global unrest was linked to an elusive “international language of dissent” furthered by a new generation of young people (the post-World War II baby-boomer generation) socialized in universities, for Immanuel Wallerstein and others, 1968 marked the beginning of a revolutionary cycle comparable to that of 1848. But, in contrast to that earlier cycle’s critique of the old regime of the nineteenth century, this mobilization focused on questioning the global hegemony of the United States and emerged in reaction to the traditional Left’s failure to stop that process.<sup>6</sup> Although in the long term, New Left activists ultimately failed to achieve their aims, according to Wallerstein their efforts were justified by their belief that their actions would be more effective.

Both approaches reveal a tension in the literature of the 1960s. While some emphasize the relative vagueness of the supposedly global counter-culture, others insist on the political dimension and revolutionary nature of the movements of the 1960s. Although these two dimensions should not necessarily be seen as antithetical, this antagonism has shaped much of the debate on the 1960s, as is illustrated by Kristin Ross’ study on the memory of the French May, May ‘68 and its Afterlives.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the approaches on Latin America, however, have put forward a much less antagonistic view of the relationship between the New Left and the traditional Left. Jeffrey Gould and Eric Zolov – in regional approaches – and Vania Markarian, Victoria Langland, and María Cristina Tortti – in studies that look at specific cases – have all suggested that, while conflicts did exist, there was also some convergence between this “movement of movements” (intellectual trends, aesthetic sensibilities, popular culture expressions, and new behaviors, social movements, political organizations, armed political groups) that the New Left embodied, on the one hand, and the traditional Left, on the other.<sup>8</sup>

Initially, these groups emerged as a reaction against the traditional Left. Their main criticism had to do with the traditional Left’s inability to come up with strategies for mobilizing the masses in a way that would create enabling conditions for the revolution. This generation was also very critical of Soviet socialism and stressed the Latin American nature of the revolution as opposed to traditional leftist views that were Eurocentric in their approach to politics. Lastly, these groups sought to organize lower-class sectors from rural areas and urban slums, which had been relatively ignored by the traditional Left. Besides these political differences, there was a distinction that arose from the strong generational imprint that these movements had. From the way they dressed, their cultural products, and their lifestyles, it was evident they sought to be part of the “language of

dissent” described by Suri, but this gesture had deep political implications that went far beyond Suri’s superficial view.<sup>9</sup>

While they disagreed over strategy, the old and new Left nonetheless had many points in common in terms of their ultimate aims, and there were certain aspects of a highly hierarchical internal political culture that marked significant continuities between the two.

In this sense, this study seeks to put into a broader context the emergence of armed groups and to contribute to an understanding of how their members were part of that “movement of movements,” as they engaged in a wide range of innovative experiences in social and cultural spheres in each of their respective countries, where the old and new Left had specific configurations, which differed from those in Europe and the United States.

In addition to this historiographical discussion, I would like to put into question the geography of the 1960s. As with the nineteenth-century revolutions, 1968 is conceptualized to a large extent with a focus on Western Europe and the United States. The vast majority of studies acknowledge the role of the Third World and its struggles in the unrest that stirred the First World. However, these aspects are limited to a mere context and are not included as part of the same network of circulation of ideas and actors.<sup>10</sup> But events in Europe and the United States were also influenced by what was happening in Latin America. One of the most popular icons in central countries during the year 1968 was the image of Che Guevara. Beyond the romantic nostalgia evoked by Guevara’s life, the impact of his image illustrates the weight that Latin America’s recent history had in the ideas and political strategies that fueled the global 60s. In this sense, it is necessary to reconstruct the place that the Southern Cone had in the global 60s, as the emergence of these actors cannot be explained from the centrality of what happened in Europe and the United States. On the contrary, several major local events that played a role in shaping this political generation also impacted the global 60s. From Che Guevara’s Bolivia campaign, with the networks it spawned in the Southern Cone and the emergence of the Tupamaros with their urban guerrilla proposal that was better suited for more urbanized societies, to the debates on the transition to socialism under the Unidad Popular government, all of these developments affected the more radical sectors of the New Left in Europe and the United States.

In sum, the 1960s were global but studies of this period, for the most part, seem to downplay the active role played by the countries of the periphery in the generation of ideas and repertoires of contention in the countries of the center. Studying this experience can thus provide greater insight into the global nature of the 1960s, enable a reflection on the role of processes that have been largely overlooked by the bibliography on the subject, and, lastly, propose new approaches to the tension between the New Left and the traditional Left under which these issues have been examined.

### Political Violence and the Left in Latin America

One of the most salient characteristics of this political generation was its defense of revolutionary political violence as a legitimate and necessary form of collective action for countering the advancing hegemony of the United States that thwarted any attempt to bring social change through peaceful and legal means. This option does not only have to do with the global unrest of the 1960s. To a large extent the radicalization that emerges among young people and lower-class sectors in the mid-1960s is one more layer in a process that had been building up through several experiences during Latin America's Cold War.

In his influential study *The Last Colonial Massacre*, Greg Grandin draws on the revolution/counter-revolution dynamics in twentieth-century Latin America to describe the emergence of the New Left as the last response to a series of failed attempts to bring about social change that were effectively contained by state terrorism practices, as epitomized by the coup against Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala staged by local elites with U.S. support in the context of the Latin American Cold War.<sup>11</sup>

As of the end of the democratic Spring of the late 1940s, the United States began to view any left-leaning political expressions and labor organization efforts in Latin America with increasingly hostile eyes.<sup>12</sup> The overthrow of Árbenz in Guatemala with major involvement from the CIA marked a watershed moment in the role played by the United States in the region, which continued with the Bay of Pigs in 1961, and was firmly consolidated with the 1964 coup d'état in Brazil. For South America, the Brazilian dictatorship ushered in a new form of authoritarian political regime based on a new role played by the armed forces, trained in the national security doctrine, which was to be replicated in the coming years in most of the countries of the Southern Cone. It also gradually shattered the reformist expectations that the Alliance for Progress had generated at the start of the decade.

Many intellectuals and activists who eventually embraced armed struggle in the late 1960s were forming their opinion on the role of the United States in the decade spanning from the coup in Guatemala to the coup in Brazil. Guevara's phrase "Cuba will not be Guatemala" is representative of this generation of activists who witnessed the growing interventionism of the United States that sought to stifle various alternatives of social reform, and who came to view armed struggle as the only possible response to that interventionism. Cuba must be considered against this backdrop. Revolution raised expectations among groups of activists who were already becoming radicalized in reaction to U.S. intervention in Latin America and the economic crises of the industrialist projects that had begun before Cuba in the context of the Cold War. Revolution offered replicable models that

in South America were viewed with favorable eyes, but also from a critical distance, as will be shown in this book. Although several authors, such as Hal Brands in his recent study, have stressed Cuba's centrality, the individual paths taken by the activists studied here show that Cuba was not the starting point. Rather it was one moment in a process of radicalization whose origins could be traced back, as Grandin posits, to the mid-1950s.<sup>13</sup>

Beside their connection with the Latin American Cold War, the explanations for left-wing violence have also prompted heated debates both in academia and in national public spheres. During the dictatorships, these groups were stigmatized, accused of being foreign agents, and used to justify the authoritarian backlash that the military regimes claimed was necessary to defend national security. In the context of the democratic transitions, the violence of these groups was mostly interpreted as the result of an ideological fanaticism that fought against another fanaticized minority formed by the military. This narrative portrayed civil society as a hostage in a polarization between actors that were removed from society and ideologically alienated from it. Different variations of this kind of narrative have been used in experiences as diverse as those of Argentina, Chile, Peru, and Guatemala.<sup>14</sup>

It was also in the context of the transitions to democracy that the subject began to be of interest to academics, essayists, and journalists. While the body of works focusing on the subject is so extensive as to make a thorough review difficult, the most relevant moments and approaches for explaining the ways in which armed struggle was perceived as of the 1980s must be highlighted.<sup>15</sup> In a climate of positive expectations regarding the return to democracy, a significant number of studies emphasized the anti-liberal nature of these groups. In the debates of the time, these practices were condemned by the general public and some sectors of the human rights movements even avoided the subject as they were reluctant to bring up the most controversial aspects of the political violence in which some left-wing groups had engaged.<sup>16</sup> Most academics were influenced by the model of democratic breakdown proposed by Juan Linz, and focused on the ways in which the emergence of such groups contributed to the process of political polarization that eroded the region's democratic regimes. In Linz's model, based on their ideology, these organizations were characterized as actors disloyal to democracy, whose actions spurred a process of political polarization that tended to undermine democratic procedures, creating a political environment in which sectors at the center of the political spectrum – who were thought to be key for the preservation of stable democratic regimes – failed in their leadership role.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, several academic works insisted on the ideological influence of the Cuban Revolution and the ways in which the intellectual mood of the 1960s set the tone for a radicalization that was largely portrayed

as alienated from the political process and which fueled the increasing polarization. For instance, in his book on the breakdown of democracy in Chile, Arturo Valenzuela argued that radical left-wing groups furthered a “self-fulfilling prophecy” as they not only denounced the inevitability of an authoritarian reaction with their maximalist discourses and practices, they also ultimately weakened center forces that would have been the only ones capable of overcoming the polarization faced by Chilean democracy.<sup>18</sup> Similar arguments were put forward by Luis Eduardo González for Uruguay and Liliana de Riz for Argentina.<sup>19</sup> In all of these cases the crises of democracy that preceded the coups were explained as being rooted in multiple causes, but when it came to armed leftist groups the descriptions focused on the major role that ideology had played in pushing them away from a democratic culture in which their views would have led the fate of these societies down a better path.

Starting in the 1990s, new studies, based on oral history and written sources, centered their attention more specifically on the armed actors themselves, offering an interpretation more focused on the internal life of these organizations than on their role in the crises of democracy. An early example of these is Richard Gillespie's book *Soldiers of Perón: Argentina's Montoneros*, published in Spanish in 1987, which emphasized the intersection of middle-class Catholic nationalism with Marxism to explain the emergence of this organization and its subsequent militarist deviation.<sup>20</sup> Other historians followed his example, attributing a significant role to the ideological aspects and cultural identity dimension of these new organizations in explaining their emergence, as well as the moments of increasing political isolation that had resulted in relatively irrational actions. This line of work was particularly prolific in the case of Argentina. In analyzing the military development of these organizations, authors such as Pilar Calveiro, Hugo Vezzetti, and Vera Carnovale highlighted the part played by ideology and internal culture.<sup>21</sup>

Along with these works, an abundant literature of testimony emerged, largely in the last two decades, which seeks to recover the experience of the militants who were active during this period. This literature, based mainly on testimonial accounts and produced by academics who are also activists, contributed to expand the chorus of voices engaged in the discussion of the issue of political violence. These approaches called attention to the weaknesses of the democracies of the 1950s and 1960s that the political and intellectual works seem to disregard.<sup>22</sup>

All of these studies on ideology and culture were useful because they reconstructed the language and ideas of armed groups in the pre-coup period. Most, however, failed to provide elements to historically approach the ways in which such groups developed their proposals. Despite the diversity of views that they represented, they all shared a methodological



principle that entailed ignoring the possibility of a link between ideological and cultural processes and political and economic transformations, which had been the focus of the academic studies conducted in the 1970s. This resulted in ideas being understood as coherently organized bodies, disconnected from the contradictory historical processes in which they emerged and from the structural changes that were affecting these societies. This type of approach made it difficult to comprehend the sinuous and conflicting paths taken by the left-wing and center-left activists and parties studied in this book, many of whom had supported reformist projects in the mid-1950s and had gone on to adopt radical postures in the late 1960s, while backing electoral initiatives even as they took up arms, and that, as of the 1980s and in the context of re-democratization, resumed their political activities through non-violent means.

In this sense, the 1980s marked a starting point for a way of thinking about political violence in academia that still influences us today and which consisted in conceiving ideology and culture as an autonomous sphere without major links to other social, economic, and political processes on which these ideas and identities were built.

By contrast, the first authors – for the most part sociologists, who in the late 1960s and in the 1970s had sought to explain this phenomenon of political violence, had always pointed to structural frameworks derived from the process of modernization or the crisis of the Latin American industrialist model. Texts such as *Political Order in Changing Societies* by Samuel Huntington and *Why Men Rebel* by Ted Gurr provided significant theoretical inspiration for sociologists of modernization who explained the anomie behavior of this political generation as the result of the divorce between the middle classes' expectations of upward social mobility and the limited material possibilities of underdeveloped societies.<sup>23</sup> Or, in the framework of the Latin American dependency theory in its various forms, they all explained the radicalization of sectors of the middle classes as resulting from the crisis of the model of import substitution industrialization and the increasing demands that the state could not satisfy.<sup>24</sup> Even in Guillermo O'Donnell's first works, the radicalization of certain sectors of the Left is presented as the result of the "stirring of the lower classes" as these countries transitioned from the populist or welfare models of the 1950s to the authoritarian bureaucratic states that would ultimately be consolidated in the 1970s.<sup>25</sup> These studies, marked by structural sociological approaches that established diverse connections between political regimes and economic processes, provided important contextual insights for understanding the radicalization of the Left, but they failed to address the concrete paths taken by that radicalization.

In short, left-wing radicalization in the region was described, either as an inevitable structural consequence, or as the result of ideological

convictions that for some spurred dictatorial authoritarianism. In this dichotomic view, those who have insisted on the more structural phenomena have tended to assign a central importance to local causalities, while those who emphasized ideological or cultural aspects have focused on the influence that the global context had on local processes.

I seek to combine the structural approaches of the 1970s, with the most recent political and cultural approaches, toward understanding the unique ways in which the ideas of the global 60s were read and reinterpreted in this part of the globe, and to provide insight into how this regional movement was shaped by the dialog between the inside and the outside. More precisely, the aim is to recreate the ways in which this political generation gradually built its political categories, based on the socioeconomic conditions and the political opportunities that the conflict with the state created or precluded. In this sense, the ideological or cultural definitions adopted by these groups must not be viewed as fixed aspects that were determined once and for all, but as symbolic resources that these movements took up, reinterpreted, and adapted depending on the historical circumstances.

In my research, the methodological tools for analyzing such dynamics from a historical perspective are inspired essentially on the reading of the works produced in the field of sociology of social movements. These are relevant to the case studied here, because they offer categories for examining the conflict dynamics that occur between social movements and the state in contemporary societies.<sup>26</sup> In this sense, categories such as “political process,” “structure of political opportunities,” and “protest repertoire” developed by social movement studies are useful for organizing an analysis of the relationship between the state and the methods of struggle implemented by these organizations. Moreover, recent studies conducted under this paradigm, which have contributed to an understanding of the complex dynamics between state repression and social protest in Europe and the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, and the development of armed leftist organizations, may also have implications for this research.<sup>27</sup> Also, the more recent contributions that have stressed the ethical and emotional dimensions of the development of social movements, offer valuable insight for examining the historical processes of construction of these groups’ identities, where subjectivity coexists with specific rationalities.<sup>28</sup> Thus, while this is an eminently historical study, I will take certain categories used by social movement researchers and apply them to the examination of the origin, development, and resignification of the violent practices and representations adopted by these organizations.

I also seek to examine the political violence of the Latin American Left, and more specifically of the Southern Cone Left, through a transnational approach that transcends the national-foreigner dichotomy in which this subject has been primarily discussed. Generally speaking, the international