and European archives. Rath's monograph is an important addition to the scholarship that is changing our understanding of mid-century Mexico.

University of Houston
Houston, Texas
acedill6@central.uh.edu

ADELA CEDILLO

DEMOCRATIZATION AND IMPUNITY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS CRIMES

Of Light and Struggle: Social Justice, Human Rights, and Accountability in Uruguay. By Debbie Sharnak. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023. Pp. 352. $45.00 cloth; $45.00 e-book.
doi:10.1017/tam.2024.10

Debbie Sharnak analyzes the changing language of human rights in Uruguay. She recounts Uruguay's history of early twentieth-century social democracy and its later descent into repression and dictatorship in a slow-motion coup. Her theme is summarized here: "By recovering the connection between the pre-dictatorship articulations of a just Uruguayan society and the human rights language of the transitional period, this book shows how a more expansive language helped give new force to a set of ideas that were nonetheless deeply rooted in the period before the 1973 coup" (7). The book provides a useful review of Uruguay's record of respect for social and economic as well as political rights, introduced by President Battle y Ordonez (1903–07, 1911–15), until the 1950s and 1960s. With an emerging economic crisis, authoritarian leaders gradually dismantled those rights. She weaves together the roles of international human rights groups such as Amnesty and WOLA (Washington Office on Latin America) with those of the Uruguayan Communist Party, the Tupamaros, the unions and the CNT (Convención Nacional de Trabajadores), the student movement, and the Frente Amplio.

The middle chapters are the heart of the book. In them, Sharnak examines the activities of domestic forces and transnational human rights groups during the dictatorship. She references the policies of the United States in chapter 3, mainly the diplomatic actions of the Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan administrations (conspicuously absent is any significant discussion of the covert role the United States played in the deepening repression of the 1960s). She outlines the end of the military regime via a pacted transition, the elected government's passage of the *Ley de Caducidad*, Uruguay's "impunity law," and the ensuing attempts by social activists to overturn it.

In the first chapter, the author takes pains to find examples of social and political movements' specific recognition of women's rights and the rights of LGBT, Afro-Uruguayans, and Jewish people during the 1960s. She repeatedly refers to the absence of women's and LGBT rights as an explicit goal of unions, political parties, and

organizations. Sharnak sees her book as a "corrective" (16) to that neglect at the time and in previous studies. But this focus risks becoming a case of expecting an earlier era to reflect a twenty-first-century consciousness. Although there was certainly awareness of women's rights and of racism in the 1960s, women's rights, and even more so LGBT rights, were often ignored around the world, including in leftist and human rights movements. Movements in favor of these rights arose in the early 1970s in the northern hemisphere and after the dictatorship in Uruguay, as the author acknowledges in the book's final pages (222–25). Without rights movements pushing for recognition, it seems somewhat ahistorical to fault the political organizations and movements of the 1960s for not reflecting these claims.

In chapters 1 and 2 and in her concluding pages, Sharnak frequently references the human rights movement's purported "minimalist," "narrow," and/or "limited" focus on the crimes of disappearance, torture, and extrajudicial execution during the dictatorship. The following is one of many such references: "The disparate social justice visions and grandiose claims for revolution in the 1960s still existed in some spheres, but they were often subsumed by minimalist calls for stopping certain violations [e.g. such as torture, disappearances, and political imprisonment]. . . the narrowing of human rights concerns of the period developed at the expense of addressing other violations" (12). This repeated claim was jarring to this reader. Even though the author is arguing that advocacy of the broad range of political, civil, social, and economic rights—previously acknowledged and promoted in Uruguay—assumed a lower priority, her choice of words is unfortunate. In the context of severe state terrorism, these demands were not minimalist or limited. They were urgent priorities amid the terrifying reality of pervasive violence and terror, torture, uncertainty, and dread; and the activities of human rights advocates saved lives. The most basic rights—to life and to bodily integrity—were under threat, and there was an urgent necessity to rescue people from the clutches of the national security state and locate and save the disappeared. Sharnak knows this, but presumably she is trying to reinforce the point that social and economic rights were less prominent within the concept of human rights during the dictatorship.

In her concluding pages, the author raises a momentous issue that is not significantly explored: that perhaps democratization is possible while impunity for human rights crimes remains entrenched. This is a controversial claim, and Sharnak acknowledges that most transitional justice scholars (and many Uruguayans) disagree. The conclusion is unsatisfying due to its inclusion of an array of points and the introduction of new themes. In sum, the book's contribution is uneven, with some good historical chapters and some undeveloped theoretical questions.

Long Island University, Brooklyn, New York J. PATRICE MCSHERRY
Instituto de Estudios Avanzados, Universidad de Santiago, Chile
pmcsherr@liu.edu