

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

M. ATHENA PALAEOLOGU (Ed.) *The Sixties in Canada: A Turbulent and Creative Decade*. Montréal: Black Rose Books, 2009, 362 p.

Reflection on the infamous decade referred to as “the sixties” conjures up images of the civil rights movement in the United States, the student revolts in Paris, as well as the anti-imperial struggles fought in Algeria, Cuba and Vietnam. Contrasting with the innumerable memoirs and histories that have proliferated in the United States and Europe is a notable silence as it concerns scholarly reflection on the sixties in Canada. In confronting the spotty archival material and the absence of New Left memoirs, writing on the sixties in Canada (or the lack thereof) has posed an enduring problem for historians and social movement scholars.

Addressing this lacuna, *The Sixties in Canada* is an edited volume comprised of fourteen chapters. The volume provides a useful starting place for addressing the fragmentary landscape of social movements and counter-culture in 1960s Canada. These chapters reveal the difficulty of negotiating cultural and political boundaries in a period when the national imaginary had been so significantly destabilized. From the outset, as the student associations in Québec debated their role in the Quiet Revolution and chose to withdraw from the national student federation in the early 1960s, the question of a distinctly “Canadian” movement became problematic. However, it was not simply a question of “two solitudes.” While an attempt was made in Québec to appropriate the language of “decolonization” from Fanon, Memmi and Malcolm X, this would be problematized by indigenous activists questioning claims to original possession. As Barbara Godard notes, the more that social movement organizations in Canada sought to cultivate a distinct collective identity, the more this led to contested claims regarding inclusion and exclusion, creating new zones of struggle on the margins.

While social movements in Canada would seek to develop unique identities, they would always be compelled to borrow their language and tactics from movements elsewhere. For example, Chris Harris emphasizes the role of American draft-dodgers in shaping the early Black Power movement in Toronto. Michael Maurice Dufresne discusses the role of the early anti-nuclear demonstrations in the UK and the American civil rights movement in shaping the Canadian peace movement. Other contributions, such as Godard’s chapter on student syndicalism, emphasize debates around colonization and American imperialism in compelling the student movement to borrow from the tactical repertoire of other struggles. In her reflections on the early Waffle movement, Pat Smart notes debates about the applicability of American activist repertoires to

Canadian social struggles, and the need to formulate a political strategy specific to Canada.

Rather than advancing a monolithic conception of youth revolt or a Manichean fight for national liberation, *The Sixties in Canada* situates struggles in the context of heterogeneous and fragmented space. For instance, in his fascinating exploration of “cross-cultural encounters” in Montréal, Sean Mills shows how the language of colonization was taken up in different ways through the intersection of groups and individuals in the cafes and on the streets. For Mills, “[e]xploring the dynamic daily interactions which occurred in the city’s streets and meeting places challenges a simplistic conflation of political ideas with linguistic and ethnic origin, reminding us of the complex ways in which new ideas are forged, challenged, and ultimately displaced” (161). Pat Smart describes the serendipitous coming together of several individuals in the Queen’s History Department and the spark it provided for the Waffle Movement. Erin Morton explores the problematic production of “folk art” in rural Nova Scotia as it was appropriated by collectors and put on display through the global culture industry.

The rapid pace of social change through the sixties led to a crisis in the state’s administrative apparatus as well as in the university. State agencies undertook numerous surveillance projects as a means of gauging the size and strength of various struggles. Marcel Martel explores the undercover operations of the RCMP, which conflated youth, hippies, and drug users in their reports on the drug “crisis” in Canada. Kristin Ireland examines the early classification of transsexual people by researchers at the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto. Some of the most interesting chapters in *The Sixties in Canada* revolve around the question of how the distribution of organizational resources and decision-making created the potential for more participatory struggles. John Cleveland notes how the conditions for radical action were cultivated between students and faculty at Simon Fraser University through the weak institutional boundaries of the “instant university.” This was not simply a struggle between technocrats and libertine youth. In fact, a central issue that activists faced was how to draw on existing institutions in order to cultivate radical social change. Kevin Brushett explores the problems encountered by activists in the selection and training of “shit-disturbers” for the federal government’s Company of Young Canadians. Rather than advancing a simple story of cooption or state repression, Brushett notes the difficulties in building a base of radical activists in a short six-week training session: “many of them simply didn’t have their shit together” (264).

While *The Sixties in Canada* covers student organizing, the peace movement, and the national question, it fails to address key struggles that were advanced through this period. Beyond some comments on women’s liberation in the chapters by Sean Mills and Bryan Palmer, there is a notable silence in this book on the second-wave feminist movement. Ecological movements are largely ignored. The wildcat strikes of industrial workers and the significant rise of public sector unions are not mentioned. The contributors also overlook recent sociological contributions to understanding the sixties. For instance, there is no mention of

Jean-Philippe Warren's numerous contributions to understanding student organizing and the nationalist movement in Québec.

By no means should this volume be considered a comprehensive history of the sixties in Canada. However, it does provide a starting point for analysis of a much neglected saga of struggle. This volume should interest historians and sociologists alike.

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