

Abstract

How is a feminist consciousness shaped? How does a social leader shift from tortured and confined anarchist to become a feminist? Using an embodied approach to social movements, this paper discusses the life trajectory of Uruguayan Lilián Celiberti to explore the collective experience of a generation of Southern Cone Latin American women who became feminists after the 1970s military dictatorships. Drawing on oral and recorded dialogues between Lilián and the author, and analyzing the *testimonio* (testimony) Lilián co-authored with Lucy Garrido, this paper explores Lilián's embodied activism and its transformation, particularly during her time in jail. What Lilián disregarded as "fanciful talk" while in Europe later became the crucial feminist narrative that helped her conceptualize the pain of being a militant mother in jail. As it did for many others in the region, a distinct feminist consciousness committed to broad social justice emerged in Lilián. Once out of prison and back to democracy, her consciousness materialized in unprecedented feminist forms of activism and women's political networks.

Biography

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Body and Emotions in the Making of Latin American Feminisms

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Body and Emotions in the Making of Latin American Feminisms

INTRODUCTION

Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both.

C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*

That Sunday she went to the *rodoviaria* [train station] of Porto Alegre to wait for a *compañera* [companion]. It was nine in the morning. A man asked her, in a cordial tone, for identification. She handed in her Uruguayan passport and was taken to an office. She was in Brazil legally, and while she knew about the new detentions in Buenos Aires and Montevideo, she saw no reason to worry. A Uruguayan said hello to her as if he knew her. She recognizes him: Captain Giannone, 1973, Punta Rieles [prison], famous for how he ransacked the parcels that relatives sent, but even more for his sustained halo of cruelty. She cannot tell herself anymore that nothing is wrong, but her awareness of danger, rather than putting her senses on high alert, plunges her into the passivity of the one who waits for the other's reaction, and she can only think that Camilo and Francesca would be in Italy if now were October [...] while she was in police headquarters, naked, and with wire in her ears and her hands, receiving electricity discharges and water... . (Celiberti and Garrido 1990, 3; my translation)

2002: New York City My Beginnings, the Research

I found out that Lilián Celiberti was a survivor of the atrocities of Plan Cóndor, the multilateral state terror coordinated by the 1970s Southern Cone Latin American dictatorships, only after our first conversation in 2002. At that time, Lilián was already a well-known feminist activist. Given her key role in the World Social Forum (WSF), she had come to New York to speak at a conference on globalization and violence that I was organizing with other graduate students. I learned then that Lilián's kidnapping (globally known as "the abduction of the Uruguayans") was regarded as proof of the repressive coordination between the Brazilian and Uruguayan dictatorships. Thus journalists, historians, human rights scholars, and filmmakers had long been interested in her.¹

Lilián herself had politicized her identity as a Plan Cóndor survivor and human rights activist before becoming the feminist I met in 2002. How did that transformation happen, I kept wondering? How does an anarchist militant survive five excruciating years of clandestine jail and torture to become a global feminist? Where does the physical and emotional strength for such an enterprise come from? How did she become such a social leader? As I dwelled on questions about Lilián's transformation, the notions that a female body does not guarantee a feminist consciousness and that mobilized women do not equal a feminist movement made more sense to me. Lilián had *become* a feminist, and she had shifted from leftist to feminist activism.

It has been well established that Latin American second wave feminism, like its Northern counterpart, was nourished by the “New Left.” The contradictions that activist women experienced within the male-dominated organized Left opened up all sorts of questions about the political. Unlike its Northern counterpart, however, Latin American second wave feminists did not emerge within democratic polities. They began to organize in the late 1970s and early 1980s amidst authoritarian regimes and transitions to democracy—periods of regressive socioeconomic transformations, deprivation of civil and political liberties, and brutal violation of human rights. Before it acquired a name, neoliberalism was part and parcel of the Southern Cone dictatorships’ project of social disciplining. As the prior internally oriented industrialization model was dismantled, the military regimes busted unions and social organizations with free market and free trade reforms (Harvey 2005, Klein 2007). In a context of increasing unemployment, poverty, and budget cuts in social spending, everyday life was pervaded by fears—from fear of hunger to the terror of abductions by the repressive state. In such a milieu, women mobilized massively. As engineers of household survival, poor and working-class women organized collectively for reasons ranging from soup kitchens to demanding rights and services like day care, public health or water. Middle-class women created new types of associations to challenge the rising cost of living. Others, like the well known *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina, struggled unwaveringly against state terror and for human rights.

Together with assessing the contribution of women’s movements to the democratic transition and consolidation processes, scholars posed the question about whether or not such massive mobilization was feminist in nature². After all, self-identified feminists were only a part, if not a minority, within the larger women’s movement (Saporta Sternbach et al. 1992). And, as Cohen and Arato (1992, 554) have defined it, to be feminist, organized women need to somehow attempt to reshape the political discourse so that their voices can be heard, their concerns perceived, their identities reconstructed, and the traditional and male dominated conception of women’s roles and bodies undermined. Authors inside and outside the region endeavored early on to show that, even if unintentionally and with actions that they often refused to call political, women, especially poor women, were in fact subverting the ideology of femininity, transforming women’s consciousness, and altering women’s roles and gender identities (Caldeira 1990, Jelin 1990, Schild 1994).

In this paper, I explore the formation of feminist consciousness—not out of the collective action of poor women but nevertheless out of sheer survival; not from working-class women who inadvertently changed the political discourse and the ideology of femininity; but from leftist militants who, as Argentinean Marta Alanis put it, purposefully “became feminists back from exile.”³ While others have used biographies for the study of collective action (Auyero 2003, Jasper 1997), I straddle an embodied approach to social movements and an analysis of Latin American *testimonios* (testimonies) to read Lilián Celiberti’s trajectory as a text that I wrote with her over several years. The letter of the text presented here is solely my responsibility. Yet, as I listened as carefully and actively as I could, I endeavored to make sense with her of all that she shared with me over the years during these oral and recorded dialogues. This broader narrative includes her own memoir, *Mi Habitación, Mi Celda* (My Room, My Cell), coauthored with Lucy Garrido, with a title that evokes Virginia Woolf as a way of suggesting her feminist transformation in prison. I pay particular attention to Lilián’s emotions and her relation with her own body, “the stuff of [political] subjectivity” as feminists like Grosz (from whom I borrow the

words) know so well but analysts of politics and social movements have only recently unearthed. By doing so, I explore her embodied activism and its transformation. Lilián's political and feminist consciousness did not emerge in a social void or a free floating world of ideas. Her consciousness was shaped and transformed as she, somewhat freely, somewhat brutally coerced, was made to *poner el cuerpo*: to be fully involved with her rational, emotional, and sensual body, as Sutton (2010, 205) would say it.

My goal is to explore not only the individual making of a social leader but also the collective process of a generation of women who transformed their political consciousness under the circumstances of military dictatorships and state terror. They developed a distinct feminist political identity. While this identity broke with the Left organizationally, "it did not fully do so ideologically" (Saporta Sternbach et al. 1992, 211) but rather became, literally and metaphorically, an experience of "women in multiple campaigns."⁴ In the prologue of *Mi Habitación*, Lilián wrote, "This is a personal vision of a great collective pain" (my translation). She thus sees herself talking not only about herself but about a collective subject. *Testimonios* are "antihegemonic and minority practice[s] committed to representing 'the people as agents of their own history'" (Sommer, in Taylor 1997, 165). Like most writers of *testimonios*, Lilián invites readers not to identify but to enter a dialogue as active and emphatic listeners, and so I follow. The call is to act as witnesses, somehow part of the conflict, somehow responsible for reporting and remembering. Drawing on this spirit, I analyze Lilián Celiberti's life, along with her *testimonio*, to explore the making of a strand of Latin American feminisms.

Note on Method and Memory

I met Lilián in 2002 when she came to New York to the conference I mentioned above as I was drafting my dissertation proposal about the World Social Forum (WSF). I was immediately drawn to this somewhat militant, somewhat playful person worried about getting a nice pair of white pants in Manhattan. I found myself captivated while listening to this extremely insightful and well-read activist. In 2003, I started my participant observation at the WSF. While my main research question focused on how this global activist process challenges the discourse of neoliberalism, I was particularly interested in the roles and contributions of Latin American feminists. I thus shared with Lilián most of her activist and social activities in the Porto Alegre 2003 and Quito 2004 meetings. I attended the panels where she spoke, the events she co-organized with the Latin American Feminist Articulation Marcosur (including those related to the campaign against fundamentalisms), and the performances and rallies where she was present. I shared meals, gatherings, and parties with her. I took copious and detailed notes on all of my ethnographic observations at the WSF, and also on my interactions with feminist activists and with Lilián. Once I decided I was interested in the genealogy not only of the WSF process but also of Latin American feminisms, I decided to interview Lilián in-depth. My own embodiment—an Argentinean, middle-class, educated, feminist graduate student writing about feminisms and the WSF—gave me privileged access to feminist activists in general, and Lilián's trust in particular. My own heterosexuality seemed to bring no dissonance to our conversations when the topic of women's sexuality and same sex desire in prison came up.

Besides meeting with her in Buenos Aires, I traveled to Montevideo three times to interview Lilián in 2004, 2008, and 2009. We discussed her life, worldviews, and insights during

conversations that ranged from two-hour semi-structured interviews, where I had planned question guides beforehand, to casual and insanely long lunches and dinners with *asado* (Argentinean and Uruguayan type of barbeque) and wine. I listened as actively and emphatically as I could. In the “testimonial interview,” as Jelin (2002) calls it while reflecting on *testimonios* and trauma from the Jewish holocaust, it is key that the interviewer becomes an “other” in dialogue. It is precisely the emphatic alterity rather than the identification that enables the *testimonio*—a meaningful social process of remembering—to happen. The goal is to go to and from the past. Rather than re-living the past, the aspiration is to create an individual and collective present that includes yet overcomes the past. “Truth,” Jelin (2002, 87) argues, is displaced from “factual truth” to a *narrativa subjetivada* (subjectivated narrative). The search for truth thus emerges within a collective and always contested narrative where the past is remembered (and forgotten) under the light of the present.

The English wording of this article is mine alone, but I know that Lilián trusts my translation wholeheartedly. I recorded and transcribed all of the interviews. I also translated personally all the quotes from Lilián’s memoir that I use here. Lilián, free spirit that she is, joyfully agreed with my project, and reiterated in several occasions, “I hope this is helpful to you!”

Body and Emotions: Blind Spots in the Study of Movements and Activism

The study of politics in the last decades of the twentieth century has been oblivious to the body and to emotions, un-reflexively reproducing ad infinitum the mind/body dualism that has characterized Western thought since Plato (Calhoun 2001). Rather than a human being who, besides thinking, breathes, suffers, sees, wants, loves and hates, the subject of politics has been conceived as predominantly shaped by cost-benefit calculations, the influence of public opinion, or some degree of social capital. Contending that “the political animal cum *animal*” has been absent from the study of politics, Mahler (2007, 224) calls for a “sensualist understanding of political engagement,” to explore how politics affects the lives of activists and the construction of the self (ibid., 236). If we are to understand Lilián’s transformation from anarchist to feminist, we need to address not only the background factors, or the conditions of possibility of the political and socioeconomic context, but also her profoundly sensual experience. We need to explore the massed bodies of leftist organizations doing politics in the streets and the tortured body of the political prisoner. The point is not only that Lilián endured intermittent physical torture over five years. The key is that, while agonizing through such experience, Lilián brought her body to the forefront of her political identity—but not as a vernacular version of identity politics. Lilián came to understand her own embodiment not only as the “very stuff of her new political subjectivity,” to use Grosz’s words again, but also as the grammar of a new political culture to be written with feminism.

“Activists’ bodily performances, capabilities, and vulnerabilities during political protest produce social, cultural and political effects,” Sutton (2010, 161) writes. She adds: “Wounded bodies, tortured bodies, defiant bodies, bodies that confront repression, bodies that protest in surprising ways, and out-of-place bodies shape both the political landscape and the embodied consciousness of participants.” Adopting and adapting a folk expression of some Argentinean activist circles —*poner el cuerpo*—Sutton elaborates on the embodiment of political agency or how the female body becomes a vehicle, text, and agent of protest and resistance.

Literally this phrase means “to put the body,” which does not quite translate from Argentine Spanish to English... *poner el cuerpo* means not just to talk, think or desire, but to be really present and involved; to put the whole (embodied) being into action, to be committed to a social cause, and to assume the bodily risks, work and demands of such a commitment. *Poner el cuerpo* is part of the vocabulary of resistance in Argentina and implies the importance of our material bodies in the transformation of social relations and history. (Sutton 2010, 161-162)

As we see below, like so many of her generation, Lilián sometimes decided, sometimes was made to *poner el cuerpo* in multiple endeavors and risks that transformed herself and the political landscape she inhabited. To make sense of this individual and collective trajectory we need to explore how bodies committed to action, how bodies were affected—cohered, rejoiced, wounded, tortured—by such commitments, and the historical effects they produced.

For many decades, together with bodies, emotions were also absent from social movements theorizing. Only recently have analysts paid attention to a wide range of sentiments beyond fear and anxiety—from erotic attraction and feelings of friendship to pride and joy; from loyalty and trust to gratitude and respect; from anger and moral outrage to shame (Flam 2005, Goodwin 1997). Emotions have come to be understood as playing crucial roles in the growth, unfolding, and decline of movements and political protest (Goodwin, Jasper and Poletta 2001). Emotions are not just experienced individually; they are also pervasive within large-scale units of social organization. And, if some emotions need more cognitive processing than others, the most relevant for politics (and activism) are those more intertwined with moral intuitions, felt rights and obligations, information about the world and collective identities—none of which is given but only culturally and historically available. Lilián Celiberti survived her plight, at least in part, with the courage she built by evoking her belonging to an anarchist federation, the strength she drew from a collective project of denunciation (supported by a human rights transnational campaign around her), and the moral outrage that information about the dictatorship produced in her.

Yet, emotions are not only socially produced with culturally available knowledge and symbols. Emotions are also powerful producers of novel meanings and organizations. Because they motivate political action, emotions are important not only to disrupt order but also to create anew. Lilián crafted a novel political self while coping with guilt and sorrow—her committed activism obliged her very young children to abandon the safe Italian exile to go to Brazil, endure kidnapping, and be motherless for five long years. While flooded by such pain, she came to shape a political subjectivity that would later flourish in a type of activist network she had hitherto not known: “While in prison, I decided that once I got out of there, I would work for feminism,” she told me over dinner when I first met her.

1967: Montevideo Her Beginnings, the Student Leader, the Anarchist

“I don’t remember a word of what I said. I had not planned it. I was not coming from any kind of rational place. I found myself speaking out—completely outraged,” Lilián said as she described to me her first public speech at a rally in 1967. Among others, students’ massed bodies were

rallying to repudiate the visit of the US president to Uruguay. Lyndon Johnson was in Montevideo en route to Punta del Este to participate in the Americas Heads of State Summit, and students were chanting something like “Yankees Go Home,” Lilián recalls. The police, in a not-yet-familiar gesture, responded with beatings. A cop had hit Sara, Lilián’s friend, on her head. Sara was bleeding. But they kept on marching. When they arrived at the plaza, Lilián, furious, standing on top of a bench, exploded in a speech that left her fellow students awed by the rhetorical skills of a seventeen-year-old with no prior political experience, and who had been elected to the student union only a few months earlier. That performance marked Lilián’s emergence as a student leader. It was an outburst of fury that would later be molded into her leadership strengths.

The same happened later in 1973 at the recently opened women’s political prison, Punta Rieles. In the eyes of Lilián, a fraction of the military tried to present themselves as “righteous nationalists,” and persuade the female prisoners that their male counterparts from Tupamaros⁵ were asking them to “trust the military.”⁶ In both events, the brutality of the repressive forces and the belittling of the judgment of women activists ignited an outrage in Lilián that would not be fleeting but would stay as part of the emotional and cognitive repertoire underlying her activist commitments. Both early incidents, where *compañeras*’ physical bodies and intelligence were abused by the repressive state, impelled Lilián to articulate a moral sensibility and a sense of duty with the political left, and also, incipiently, with feminism.

Born in Montevideo in 1950 to a lower middle class family, Lilián grew up with the idea that politics was noble—and mostly for men. According to Lilián’s father, political clubs and organizations from traditional parties (like Partido Blanco or Colorado) to community organizations (like the school co-op or the neighborhood organization) were all legitimate places to “engage in politics”—provided it was not the Communist Party. For Lilián’s mother, politics as such was not an alternative. Training to become a teacher was a culturally available option for a girl of the times. When sixteen, Lilián entered an overly feminized and feminizing (if not infantilizing) public college. The student body was mainly women who were, for example, forbidden to wear pants. Lilián soon became interested in the “sociopedagogic missions,” students’ fieldtrips to rural schools sponsored by the college. In her eyes, rural schools were democratic public spheres, “islands of the state and democracy in the sea of rural poverty and *latifundios* (big landowners),” she said. “It was an experience of ‘multiple impacts’ for me,” Lilián recalls. As she saw and smelled rural poverty for the very first time in *Capilla Ferruco*, she also came across collective action, group dynamics, and her own role as leader.

Back in the city, her fellows invited Lilián to the student union meetings, which she began to attend frequently. They asked her to run for student unionist representing a political group that was “everything on the left but communists”—anarchists, Catholics and leftists of different sorts—akin to what the political sensibilities of her father had authorized at home. Lilián accepted. As they won, they were thrown into the core of the tumultuous late 1960s. Within the boundaries of the college, the mismatch between the growing number of incoming students and the lack of public investment had created tensions. More professors, classrooms, subsidized transportation, and other economic resources were now needed. Beyond the walls of the college, in the context of the crisis of import substitution industrialization, shrinking GDP, rampant inflation, and the IMF’s austerity policies, student groups were one among the many active

grassroots organizations whose claims resonated with wage increases and other labor union demands (Barret 2008, Weschler 1990).

Lilián found herself thrown to a highly mobilized milieu she had not deliberately chosen. “How did you feel?” I asked her. “Very confused. I understood nothing. I remember asking myself: ‘What the hell is the IMF?’ or ‘How on earth do they [male activists] know that “We should expect”... as they stated again and again, seemingly without a single doubt.’” As she tried to map the male-dominated terrain of political activism and apparent certainties, Lilián recalls a sense of deep disorientation: “It was a world of clues that I was unable to decode, but which still felt, paradoxically, very close to me.”

The elective affinity between the student and the anarchist labor movements had been growing since the early 1950s. The libertarian ideals against capitalist societies and the search for autonomy and participatory democracy materialized in 1956 in the *Federacion Anarquista Uruguaya* (Uruguayan Anarchist Federation, FAU), which recruited members from both movements. Lilián joined them in 1967. The FAU was one among the many popular organizations active in the turbulent period that preceded the 1973 coup in Uruguay. The Tupamaros guerrillas, who had emerged in the early 1960s captivated by the Cuban revolution, started out with actions where they “seldom had to fire a shot” but by 1967 were becoming spectacular in their actions (Weschler 1990, 103). During that “five-year-long slow-motion coup,” the dynamic between Tupamaros and the government radicalized both the violence and the state repression (Weschler 1990, 110; Barret 2008).

Political engagement and activism was not only a mental and bodily disposition that Lilián acquired during her early years, beginning at home with her gendered political socialization. It was the oxygen of Uruguayan political culture. Political participation practices were systematically encouraged from formal and informal educational institutions. Civic desires were nourished as the basis for a sense of belonging to the political community (Coraza de los Santos 2005). For a socially curious youngster of the late 1960s, therefore, becoming an activist was almost a given. It was part of the lifeworld that shaped her moral sensibilities. The choice was, rather, between different ways of embodying politics, or different ways of *poner el cuerpo*. “Politics in the streets” and “politics with weapons” were two types of activists’ performance that entailed different kinds of work and bodily risks—yet were somehow part of the same umbrella project.

Despite (or perhaps because of) Lilián’s ideological and personal proximity to armed struggle organizations (her sister and her first boyfriend were Tupamaros), she did not embody them. She built her own political identity as distinct from the use of open violence. FAU had a public face, the Workers-Students Resistance, to which Lilián belonged, and a clandestine component, the Popular Revolutionary Organization, devoted to the armed struggle—activists and printed material circulated freely between them. Although part of a single political field, the two components entailed different types of embodying activism. “I was never seduced by the armed struggle,” Lilián told me, and she narrates her position as a conscientious choice, insisting on “profound disagreements” with politics with weapons. Lilián was enticed by the energy of massed bodies in rallies, the togetherness of open and visible activist work, and the daylight

performance of assemblies. A gifted public speaker, she was at home in the world of public deliberation.

Even if safer than politics with weapons, the visible politics in the streets still entailed enormous bodily risks in the Southern Cone. Compared with Argentina or Chile, relatively few Uruguayan oppositionists were annihilated immediately after the military coup (109 killed and 163 disappeared). Yet between 1968 and 1985, the Uruguayan military ran an infamously effective totalitarian system. The number of Uruguayans who went into exile, were detained for political interrogation, or received long prison sentences for political offenses was unbelievably high compared to any other country.⁷ Initially, the majority of confined bodies were Tupamaros, but later they included labor leaders, lawyers, professors, journalists, one-time members of the Communist and Socialist parties, constitutionalist soldiers, and student leaders like Lilián (Weschler 1990, 87, 124). She was twice in political prisons, for a few months in 1971 and in 1973. In between, she spent a year alone with her son Camilo while her husband, Hugo, was in jail. Being alternately in jail was their life until they went into exile together in 1974. Far from being a daily experience of co-habitation, Lilián's early marriage was a shared ground of political allegiances. She wedded so young "to be free from fighting with my mother because I was late at night." She believed that marriage was "simply a private and easy-to-undo act," and was oblivious to the social force of the institution. These conditions would later become fundamental to her feminist transformation in jail.

1976: Milan

The Revolutionary-in-Exile, the Human Rights Advocate

After the coup in June 1973, most leftist activists went into exile first in Chile, then in Buenos Aires, and then after the Argentinean coup in 1976, in Mexico and other Latin American countries (Barret 2008). But Lilián went directly to Italy. The FAU was no longer clandestine and the military allowed her to leave the country. She left with her husband and their four-year-old son, Camilo. Years later, Lilián would become an Italian citizen, thanks to her father's Italian ancestry. While in Milan, however, she lived the life of a political refugee and an undocumented immigrant worker, finding emotional support and material help for survival within a community of Catholic leftists.

During the first two years, she distanced herself from FAU and activism in general. She gave birth to her second child, Francesca, while confronting the challenges of everyday life in exile with a husband she had barely lived with until then. Lilián was thus physically absent at the 1975 Buenos Aires conference where Uruguayan anarchists turned the federation FAU into a political party (*Partido de la Victoria del Pueblo*, PVP). Only after political casualties began in 1976 did Lilián reengage her activism fully. Repression had become massive in Argentina, and most of Lilián and her husband's friends, fellow activists, and acquaintances were still there. Most of them, like Margarita Michelini, were being persecuted, and disappeared.⁸ The urgency of the situation thus pushed them to start working politically again, this time to rescue as many activists as possible and bring them to Europe, mainly to France. Like most survivors of state terror who need new language to make sense of the phenomenon (Randall 2003, 9), those arriving who had outlived Argentinean state terror were in desperate need to, quoting Lilián, "reconstruct the puzzle of a singular situation," which they understood as historically new. "As we listened to

survivors' experiences, we created a new political idiom with which to frame the political project of the military," Lilián recalls.

Because so many of them were in Paris in 1977, PVP affiliates with almost no surviving leaders decided to put their bodies again into the work of resistance and denounce the Uruguayan dictatorship and its human rights abuses, continuing the task which they had started in 1973 and interrupted with the Argentinean coup in 1976.⁹ Lilián said, "We realized we needed to reconstruct the mystique of our own project after so much devastation." It was then that she decided to abandon her Italian exile and go to Porto Alegre. For PVP members, Brazil was not their own country, but it still meant "getting closer to the region." And Brazilian *abertura* policy¹⁰ seemed to provide safer conditions from which to struggle for the human rights of fellow activists who could not even claim protection as refugees.

Emotions and cognition intertwine to shape the moral sensibilities and life trajectories of activists (Jasper 1997). The political and the personal are not only identical, but also interwoven threads in the fabric of an activist biography. In 1977, Lilián separated from her husband. Of course, Hugo was not responsible for the many individuals whom Lilián and he had recruited for the party from union activism, and who were now being persecuted, disappeared, and tortured. Yet, according to Lilián, Hugo was overwhelmed by guilt and fear. In our conversation, Lilián pauses before narrating her ex-husband's state of mind and her decision to leave him. She is ambivalent and, still today, seems to be coming to terms with her choice and likely explanations of what happened.

Shit...I was twenty-five, I had two children, and a completely emotionally dependent husband...I was solely responsible for creating some sense of normalcy at home. If I was anguished, I had to wait till my children were asleep and lock myself in the bathroom to cry. I had to shoulder so many burdens.

And she concludes:

It was an awfully complicated process. But eventually I left him. And of course this also triggered my decision to leave for Porto Alegre. Even if I was very committed to the political project, *I myself* did not need to go to Porto Alegre. I *chose* to do so. Personally, I *needed the physical distance* from my husband.

The leftist PVP survived the decision to resume its political work in Brazil and, in 1980, became part of the Frente Amplio, the coalition that won the Uruguay presidential elections in 2004. Lilián's trajectory as that type of leftist activist, however, did not survive. In 1978, her activism shifted radically, as we see below.

1978: Porto Alegre, Montevideo The Physical Body...

After six months in Porto Alegre trying to reconstruct networks of lawyers, journalists, and activists with the PVP, Lilián decided to bring her children, who had been staying with their grandmother in Milan. On a Sunday morning twenty days after their arrival, while going to the

train station to meet another activist as I describe in the opening of this article, Lilián was kidnapped together with her two children and fellow militant Universindo Rodriguez. With that abduction began the well-known five-year journey of torture and jail where she was kept incommunicado, followed by another, longer round of political prison.

Did you feel more pain than fear?

You feel fear at intervals. In the actual moments you only feel pain. The real fear is the one you feel when a torture session ends and you know that another one will start, or nothing starts [but] you are waiting, paralyzed by that sensation, maybe the worst you can ever feel. At that moment, what pains you most is the humiliation of being there, howling, with your body smeared with shit, jumping out of control, unable to stop yourself. That is the goal of torture: denigrate you as a person, so that you will lose control of your body and feel like a lot of flesh, bones, and shit, and pain and fear. (Celiberti and Garrido 1990, 4; my translation)

Atrocious as it is, dehumanizing to victims and perpetrators alike, torture was not an outburst of the military abusing its repressive power. If the economic program was organic to the military project of social disciplining (Canitrot 1979, Klein 2007), torture went well beyond the need to interrogate for information. Torture was an intrinsic piece in the strategy of terror to literally exterminate political others. Hardly restricted to guerrillas, the key targets of annihilation within the “national reorganization”—to use the words of the Argentinean military authorities— included intellectuals, unionists, students, journalists, artists, liberation theology-minded Catholics including priests and nuns, and activists like Lilián. All over the Southern Cone, the military project to produce a new national being and a “cleansed social body” was played out with the individual bodies of the “subversives,” to continue with jargon that the Argentinean military used. In the words of Diana Taylor (1997), “In the torture scenario, the torturer (like the military leaders) claimed total control of the social ‘body.’ Torture functioned as a double act of inscription: first, in the sense of *writing the body* into the nationalist narrative and, second, in the sense of *writing on the body*, taking a living body and turning it into text—a cautionary ‘message’ for those on the outside” (ibid., 152). “The metaphors—the individual body, the social body, the body politic—literally coalesce in torture” (ibid., 157). It is not by chance, or just out of sadism, that torture was often staged as a sexual act. “Motifs associated with foreplay, coupling and penetration,” ensured that not only female but also male sexed bodies were made penetrable and thus “feminine,” evoking the military ideal of a docile social and political body (ibid., 152). Yet, the bodies of women activists or of women closely related to activists (wives, lovers, sisters, friends) were particularly targeted with sexualized practices, with female sexual slavery such as gang rape, family torture, animal rape, and mutilating genital practices (Barry 1979), with which the military would “teach the lessons” of the patriarchal military state (Bunster-Burotto 1986).

When reflecting on her own experience of torture, Lilián draws on Beatriz Aguad. Torture seeks to degrade the body because the body is the site of the first identifications, “the medium that the human being has at her disposal at the beginning of her existence to distinguish what is one’s own from what is alien; it is the place of exchange with the environment and the other; it is the flesh, the pre-history of ideals” (in Celiberti and Garrido 1990, 28; my translation). In Lilián’s mind, now and then, the goal of torture is to erase “the pre-history and the history” of the human

being to the point of psychological destruction and political extermination—“disappearance was the main enemy to fight” (ibid., 4). “The *coup* took the war to the trenches of basic humanity: fighting to be persons, despite the circumstances, was the main trench of the only war that took place in the country since the coup—that of dignity against terror” (ibid., 13). Lilián would later deconstruct the language of wars and battles. Such language would not be the one she needed years later in the context of a democratic government and the rule of law, as a feminist activist working within the first feminist NGO in Uruguay. Moreover, years later, Lilián would be interested in making “the frontiers between ‘us’ and ‘them’ more porous.” In the midst of terror, however, she spoke of the “only war in the country.” The fact that the military was torturing its own soldiers reshaped the battleground. The war was not about class struggle any longer. The war was not between dictatorship and democracy. The war was, Lilián felt, about something much more primary. The war was over which body counted as human, which organism counted as life, nothing else.

Even if only unconsciously or half consciously so, torture has a structure (Scarry 1986). It announces its own nature as “an undoing of civilization, acts out the uncreating of the created contents of consciousness” (ibid., 38). Like all intense physical pain, torture challenges language and representation. Whereas language is so resourceful and literature so fertile in expressing emotional pain, they run dry when it comes to representing physical pain. The insightful Virginia Woolf put it compellingly: Any teenager in love has Shakespeare to speak her mind for her. But try communicating your headache to your doctor and you’ll find the limits right away (ibid., 4). Torture not only defies language, it actively destroys it—literally, by bringing out yelling and sounds that human beings produce before they acquire language. By inflicting excruciating pain, torture destroys all but itself. “*In the actual moments you only feel pain,*” Lilián wrote. There is no room for anything else—or everything else, what one believes in or cares about, and whom one loves or hates, shrink to the point of disappearance. Self, world, and voice are reduced to the point of being unmade. And that world unmaking, that uncreating of the created world, becomes itself, an acute source of pain (ibid.). “*What pains you most is the humiliation of being there, howling...jumping out of control....*”

If the nature of torture is totalizing, like Scarry claims, if everything in the torture room, every part of the victim, her body and her voice, is made an agent of agony and an efficient weapon to decompose the products of civilization and, ultimately, civilization itself, how did Lilián survive? If, continuing with Scarry, the capacity for speech itself, the ability that humans have to project words in order to inhabit and humanize a space larger than their own bodies is wholly annihilated in torture, how did Lilián save her voice? How did she rescue a self and a world for her? How did she keep her humanity in the face of torture? My answers are surely partial and incomplete. As a witness of Lilián’s plight, I can only offer what I was able to listen to from her. As a witness of her own plight and creator of her own memory, Lilián herself can only offer a selective and fragmented account. Far from *The Truth*, I reclaim, with her, a truthful account. As I recuperate, with her, those fragments of body and voice, those pieces of collective identity and inner dialogue in jail, I explore some of the strands that kept her alive—and the ordeal that marked her paradigmatic transformation from revolutionary to feminist activist.

... and the Feminist Voice

“My revenge is to survive to tell this story,” Argentinean survivor of torture Alicia Partnoy wrote in the introduction to her bilingual book of poetry *Revenge of the Apple/Venganza de la Manzana* (in Taylor 1997, 157). Like Partnoy, Lilián wrote. And also reenacted in her own *testimonio* her survival strategy: her own sensual and rational way of resisting the undoing of herself and her world. On the one hand, after torture sessions were over, she distanced herself from the excruciating bodily pain by taking refuge in the most quotidian, the few warm sounds she had at her disposal. She showered and combed her hair with a ceremonial attitude. She made dolls with bread crumbs, and she listened to “Ana, who captured my deaf sounds of anguish behind the wall, singing to me, very low, ‘Palabras para Julia’” (Celiberti and Garrido 1990, 14; my translation).

What was more important: shower to be clean or shower to change routine?

Both, but maybe more to defend that space of healthy flirtation which is about being at ease with one’s own body...I wanted to shower to feel that my body was dignified. (Celiberti and Garrido 1990, 14; my translation)

On the other hand, Lilián never ceased evoking her sense of belonging to an anarchist group, turned into PVP, a socialist party, in 1975. She was connected to a whole larger than herself that empowered her. The war was about something more primary than “socialism,” but evoking her belonging to the PVP gave her the emotional resources with which to build courage to face her own panic. She was not alone—she knew about the campaign that party members, journalists, human rights lawyers, and prestigious jurists were organizing around her case to unveil the workings of Plan Cóndor at international human rights courts.¹¹ She nurtured her reservoir of optimism by bringing to mind political beliefs she had shared with *compañeros*, and the collective responsibility she was individually assuming. Her own words are worth quoting at length:

I was not only individuality thinking and living that circumstance: I was also the result of a collective political endeavor, the party...

They did not kill me. They did not disappear me. ... Even if I spent one year and a half by myself in conditions that were unpleasant, I felt that the military, the regime, was also paying a price for this. ... I was also rewarded: to be able to denounce them by my very being in the cell, to accuse the guilty. (Celiberti and Garrido 1990, 11; my translation)

Notwithstanding the key importance of her sense of belonging to a collective project, Lilián’s most powerful way to defy the annihilation of her own self and world was her own voice, her dialogue with herself, about herself. “You enter a process of such physical and emotional damage that it is very easy to lose touch with reality. You do not feel like eating, you do not want to move,” she told me. Occasionally, the guards gave her a book, which she devoured. But she had nothing else—only the materials of her own life in a context of “mental chaos,” in a “dialogue that is later impossible to reconstruct. You can only try to assume the circumstances of your own life in the most difficult situation, one of extreme uncertainty, where you do not know how long you will stay alive.” A cacophony of the sounds of her life came to her all at once.

Motherhood. Guilt. Sara. Francesca. Woman. Camilo. Marriage. Activism. Choices. Hugo. Mother. Conditions one is born into. Father. Shaping life beyond one's will.

When I walked, the cell turned into a great mirror of myself, everything was there and just me to watch it. Every event of my life began to have a single thread. The desire to be independent at eighteen, in 1968, trying to experience the construction of something new and believing that things would be easier. The wedding, the desire and need to have a child, how free that decision seemed to have been, when in fact I had only conformed to the socially imposed fate of a woman, with the idealism of an epoch in which the personal was bourgeois, and the spirit of sacrifice marked the commitment. Many things were falling apart, but the mirror sent back to me "Thanks to Life" again. Many paths were opening and I felt the cell was getting bigger. Maybe I had chosen wrongly, I had been hasty, but also the reality and time that I had had to live in had not left me other spaces.

I began to feel that something was moving inside me with this reflection. Something new was growing out of mercy, something that had begun in France, something that (now I saw it clearer) had affirmed itself when I had decided to live in Brazil: an autonomy and independence that would also mean a tough and difficult road for me, but this time I had chosen it. One day before traveling, a friend had said: "I don't understand you, I wonder how you can leave your kids behind and go." I had no words to answer, I was leaving my children and a man I loved but at stake was something I was ashamed to say: I, woman, twenty-eight years old, mother, separated, was beginning to feel that never before had I made a decision in my personal life without following models of women that had been constructed beforehand for me. It was like the mirror of Alice in Wonderland, the tunnel went very deep, and I was beginning to see that my own personal things had something to do with other women, with an unnamed history that confined our anxieties to a cell even smaller than the one I was inhabiting at that moment. (Celiberti and Garrido 1990, 16; my translation)

In the most atomizing condition of bodily confinement, Lilián began to recall feminist ideas which she had been exposed to earlier in Europe. She had participated in a consciousness-raising collective in Milan. She had witnessed a Workers' Vanguard (*Vanguardia Operaria*) political act, where a group of women workers had dramatically taken over the stage, and physically displaced and silenced their male fellow workers. Yet, none of that had impacted her. She had ignored that performance, and disregarded, skeptically, that "talk" as "*Cosas de Europeas*" (fanciful European things). Those were not her priorities. She was focused on the socialist struggle against capitalism. She had to fight to defend the most basic integrity of her fellow militants against the military's brutality.

But now, amidst the confusing pain of the cell, she was forced to explore them. She was thrown into a desperate search for answers. How to ease the guilt of being a mother in jail? She was desolate, knowing her ex-husband had only taken their son to live with him in Milan, separating the siblings and leaving Francesca, the daughter, by herself with her grandparents in Montevideo. She needed the word "patriarchal"—but did not yet have it. How to comfort herself after the words of her friend Sara? She had heard them as immensely cruel. Why was she made a monster

when she decided to go to Porto Alegre and leave her children with their grandmother in Italy? Why were male activists able to avoid such charges when they left their children behind? The effects of being a mother in prison are harder to erase than the effects of torture itself, Lilián says. Engaging in the struggle for social change has not been hard, but living with the consequences of that decision as a mother has been insurmountable. “I repeatedly relived the moment of saying farewell to Camilo and Francesca; until today I cannot think about it without dying a bit” (Celiberti and Garrido 1990, 6; my translation).

Also analyzing *Mi Celda*, Jelin (2002) claims that Lilián’s trauma, her “rupture and void” is not produced by her disappearance but triggered by her relationship with her children. Women are overwhelmed by guilt—much more so than men. The emotional bond with children becomes an enormous burden when there is no social support for mothering. Because women are socialized in a circle of body-nature-motherhood, women get to be bodies as long as they are potential mothers, Lilián says. “If we choose the path of participation, of independence, of mastering nature, of knowledge, and of valuing our body, we will feel monsters more than once,” (Celiberti and Garrido 1990, 19; my translation). The idea that women aspire to motherhood as an unquestioned natural destiny, that being a mother is beautiful but still takes a toll on women, no longer felt alien to her. The feminist ideas she had earlier ignored as almost snobbish talk now helped soothe her inner cacophony. They felt like a balm that calmed her anguish and organized her guilt. “It was as if different parts of me were coming together. It was as if there had been a future alive in me that only now was making sense,” she told me. Feminism helped Lilián reinterpret her own plight and re-narrate to herself the facts of her life in a tale that started to feel healing.

After her solitary period of a year and a half was over, she was sent to Punta Rieles, the same women’s political prison she had inaugurated back in 1973. Her recently discovered feminist resources gave her a different lens with which to look at the collective life of women in jail. Once again meeting her fellow activists who had been confined there for seven years, Lilián was outraged at how the dictatorship had gotten into their bodies by preventing them from becoming mothers. For the first time, she became highly interested in building community among women. She got involved in the collective resistance initiatives like the study groups or the theater performances in jail. New questions about women’s lives and female sexuality opened up in her mind. She started valuing women’s emotional resources, their tenderness, and their ability to care for each other, both as life-sustaining and as a key means of political resistance. Yet, why was friendship between women so feared? Why was intimacy among women such a ghost? Why was lesbianism such a cultural fear and personally so unsettling? Why was women’s masturbation in jail unnamable while men’s was taken for granted? Why was women’s sexual expression confined to a jail inside the jail—which had to do with only a personal, self-chosen jail? Why was women’s own sexuality a secret for women themselves? “I came to understand that even if each life was infinitively singular, there was a string that bound us all together,” she told me.

Once that Pandora’s box was opened, issues moved away from being (or unable to be) a mother in jail, and women’s sexuality. Politics became center stage. What made something “political?” Lilián kept on asking herself. Questions about leadership and the potential of activism in collectives as she knew them also appeared puzzling and in need of new answers. In fact, when she came out of prison, when it was time to “insert ourselves again, strengthen our political and

social organizations, find jobs, live our affectivity... ." (Celiberti and Garrido 1990, 37; my translation), Lilián opted for something different. In 1984, she started a feminist magazine with a friend who, thanks to a generous salary from the Italian Embassy in Uruguay, could fund its publishing. In 1985, with the return of democracy, she co-founded the first feminist NGO in Uruguay and named it *Cotidiano Mujer* (Everyday Woman). Lilián's inner talk thus translated, once out of prison, into a political form she had hitherto not known. Her voice within her confined body in the cell created a consciousness that materialized in a new political praxis when she was back in the world.

From the 1980s to the Global Scale

Stoltz Chinchilla describes how, in the United States and Western Europe, the work of transforming Marxist-feminism into a political project seemed to have languished on the back burner after the 1980s call to "join ranks against the right-wing attack on feminism and women's rights" (1992, 27). In Latin America, feminism broke organizationally with the Left, but at least a strand of it conserved strong ideological affinity. In the mid-1970s, however, for the prevalent male-dominated leftist discourse, "women's issues" were, at best, "secondary contradictions" that would wither away once the revolution solved capital-labor relations. At worst, feminists were bearers of false consciousness who, disconnected from the "real issues" of the region, had adopted a fashion, like others had done with jeans, and were thus "being instrumental to Yankee imperialism." Yet, the typical second wave Latin American feminist in many countries was, like Lilián, a former student militant and hardly a "self-obsessed bourgeois lady" (Saporta Sternbach et al. 1992, 211). In the early 1980s, maintaining a "dual militancy" by straddling between left-wing parties and women's organizations was the typical experience for Latin American feminists, including Lilián. The sometimes harsh dialogue between *militantes* (militants) and *feministas* (feminists) that pervaded events like the biannual Encuentros¹² contributed to creating a distinct feminist collective identity that called to "revolutionize everyday life." While retaining its unwavering commitment to broader social justice and popular empowerment (Alvarez 1998), the Latin American feminist movement developed its own vision of culture, society, and politics (Saporta Steinbach et al. 1992). Since having left prison and throughout the 1980s, Lilián was both a *militante* with leadership responsibilities in the PVP, and a *feminista* in *Cotidiano Mujer*, "a collective through which a group of women with absolutely no journalistic training struggled to have a feminist voice in the Uruguayan media. It was fun, we were clueless, we debated *everything*, we learned so much..." Lilián recalls tenderly.

Since Mexico 1975, the UN World Women Conferences have brought together women's bodies from all over the globe in unprecedented numbers to meet each other, share information, and become attuned to their common concerns. The UN conferences thus legitimized women's issues and created the conditions for building and strengthening feminist networks across borders (Keck and Sikkink 1997). For Latin Americans, the 1995 Beijing process was pivotal to linking and consolidating their energies in networks of (now multiple) feminist identities (Alvarez 1998). This new kaleidoscope and the "healthy decentering" of feminist practices redefined and expanded the feminist agenda—now seeking to "see the world and the general struggle through a gendered lens" (Alvarez 1998, 299). "Above all," Lilián told me, "we are interested in the democratic life of society as a *whole*." When I asked her to elaborate further, she said, "I think that we, feminists, have a more complete view. Because modern feminist thought from the

suffragettes and the second wave emerged as a radical critique to modernity... it emerged breaking paradigms to think about the individual and the collective... . Because we have been working in the issue of subjectivity, we have a more complete vision of democracy, politics, culture, and the alternatives...when we engage in alternative thought, we make a difference.”

In 2000, Cotidiano Mujer joined those in the women’s movement who were scrutinizing the gains of the 1995 Beijing Platform and its selective implementation. “Is *this* what we wanted from Beijing?” Lilián emphasized the skeptic overtone of the times. Many of them believed that the institutionalization of egalitarian goals through policies such as affirmative action and so-called empowerment programs for women had come at the expense of an overall depoliticization of the feminist agenda. Granted, institutions of civil society, the state, and international development had absorbed pieces of feminist discourses and agendas—but only the “most digestible” of them (Alvarez 1998, 294). And in some cases, women’s gains had been completely detached from formal democracy and the rule of law. “We found out, for example, that some birth control programs in Fujimori’s Perú were in fact a dark reiteration of Malthusian population control,” Lilián recalled in 2004. She then added, “We are definitively not interested in women not bearing children, we are interested in women being able to do *what they want*, to have the adequate conditions to have children if and when they want to, and the freedom of not having them when they do not want to. But above all, we are interested in the whole democratic life of society...we had fallen into some kind of ghettoization.”

Another dimension of the post-Beijing self critique was that, in the words of Lilián, “too much energy had been spent engaging governments.”¹³ Perhaps the opportunities opened up by the recovery of democracy at the national level, and the Beijing process at the global level, ended up involuntarily reproducing patriarchal and state-centric strategies, or “the old Marxist view” where the state, as it condenses all power relations, is the only relevant site and target of political struggle. Whatever the reason, in the eyes of feminists, the time had come to engage other political actors from civil society and other social movements. They decided to create a new type of political organization “very flexible in its form” for “those who thought alike and wanted to get together to work in politics,” as Lilián put it. Feminist Articulation Marcosur was thus officially established in 2000. Building upon the organizational capital that had grown out of the preparation for and evaluation of the UN Beijing Conference, this transnational network brings together organizations and individuals from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Perú, and Uruguay. Needless to say, it is through this network that Lilián became so involved in the global justice movement, and the World Social Forum.

2011: Epilogue

“Fanciful European talk,” “a fashion like jeans,” “a secondary contradiction,” “Yankee imperialistic imposition”—not just men, but women themselves suffocated “women’s issues” after having internalized the male-dominated discourse of the Left. That is why the Argentinean feminist Marta Alanis told me in 2009: “For those of us who, in the 1970s, led the revolutionary struggle in the shadows of men, feminism appeared as a gift of life. In the midst of so much pain, feminism was a balm.” Like Lilián, she belongs to a generation of battered Latin American women activists. Not all of their individual bodies were tortured by military regimes. But for most of them, the revolutionary project became painful, myopic. As framed back then, “the

revolution was undoable,” but the impossibility of political and socioeconomic transformations was not the only source of pain. The typical 1970s leftist organization working for the revolution to happen, like the FAU, later turned to PVP, led by men and pervaded by a male-centric logic, allowed little or no room to politicize bodies—the materiality of (women’s) bodies, bodies’ desires and needs, sexuality, motherhood, or everyday life. There was plenty of room, however, for women like Lilián to put their bodies to work—their physical energies, their time, their intelligence, their charisma, their emotional care, and their passion for public speaking when authorized. Lilián put her body in motion and at risk to support anarchism as student leader. Seduced by the collective energy of massed bodies in rallies and assemblies, Lilián put her whole embodied being to work for revolutionary politics in the streets.

While in Milan as a revolutionary-in-exile, Lilián heard about “feminism” and was even exposed to defiant bodily gestures by working class women, like when at a rally of the leftist Workers’ Vanguard, female activists took over the stage to physically displace and silence their fellow male workers. At that point, however, she disregarded the feminist repertoire as besides or beyond her priorities. But when overwhelmed by her tortured body and emotional confusion in an isolated Plan Cóndor cell, she revised those ideas. To confront her own panic, she built courage by evoking her belonging to a socialist organization. Yet, to make sense of her own experience in jail, she had to disrupt that belonging—and create something anew. The world that terror unmade, her own voice had to make anew. To cope with the guilt of what her activism had meant for her children, she had to question the whole experience of motherhood with a language she had previously ignored. Lilián started an inner dialogue, seeking emotional comfort by narrating to herself a story that felt healing. Yet, once the conversation began, it widened, from mothering, guilt, femininity, and women’s sexuality to interrogating the scope, nature, and subject of politics. She began to scrutinize male-dominated political leadership and activism in leftist collectives as she knew them. Her embodied voice created a consciousness that materialized, once out of jail, in a new type of political praxis, and contributed to the political discourse that the then incipient feminist networks were working to strengthen.

Paradoxically, even as it stifled potentially feminist voices, 1970s leftist activism enabled the emergence of (at least a part of) Latin American feminisms. Leftist militancy sowed dispositions in women activists that, once out of prison and back to democracy, could ripen into a new political praxis. Leftist militancy created the conditions for a generation of women to build a movement that, three decades later, would be “involved in multiple campaigns,” seeking to work on global problems that range from “how to deal with fundamentalisms to the sense of a planet in war, a planet in crisis, where natural catastrophes are becoming everyday stuff because of the abusive and capitalist use we make of natural resources.”¹⁴ In other words, the 1970s leftist militancy nourished a type of activism physically resilient and symbolically malleable enough to survive not just state terror but also its own transformation. And, after accommodating the intimate, the personal, and the material body into the political, it still preserved a commitment and an aspiration to broader, now global, social justice.

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NOTES

¹ Among the most well-known is journalist Luiz Claudio Cunha of *Veja* magazine, who witnessed Lilián's kidnapping and wrote extensively about it. Historian Serra Padros wrote *El Vuelo del Cóndor en Porto Alegre*, and filmmaker Roberto Mader made the documentary *Cóndor* in 2007.

² Alvarez 1990, Jelin 1990, Jaquette 1994, León 1994.

³ Marta Alanis is an active member, now president, of Catholics for Free Choice in Argentina. She also shifted from revolutionary militant to feminist. I interviewed her in July 2009 in Córdoba, Argentina.

⁴ Lilián defined herself with these words in 2002 while participating in an activity for the right to water at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. See http://www.rimaweb.com.ar/feminismos/lilian_celiberti_dialogos.html.

⁵ As I elaborate below, Tupamaros were a guerrilla group that emerged in Uruguay in the 1960s and were active until a few months before the 1973 coup.

⁶ In February, the military had issued what came to be known as “*communiqué 4 & 7*,” where they presented themselves as nationalists and strong supporters of national economic development. Some members of the Communist Party argued that the military were thus “neutral” in the class struggle—disorienting many on the left, and undermining resistance against the coup in June (Barret 2008).

⁷ Between 10 percent and 13 percent of the whole population went into exile between 1970 and 1985. According to Amnesty International, of those remaining, one in every fifty was detained for interrogation, and one in five hundred received a long prison sentence (Weschler 1990, 88).

⁸ Margarita Michelini was the daughter of Senator Michelini, one of the first Uruguayan political refugees in Argentina to be secretly kidnapped, tortured, and killed, also becoming an “icon” of Plan Cóndor (Herman 1982).

⁹ “Partido por la Victoria del Pueblo/Frente Amplio. Quienes Somos?” See http://www.pvp.org.uy/?page_id=225, my translation.

¹⁰ In 1974, in order to maintain the stability of the military regime, the Brazilian government began to grant certain restricted civil and political liberties like allowing elections at the municipal and state level.

¹¹ In 1979, this network of activists took Lilián’s case to the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations (July 17) and the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights of the Organization of American States (August 15) and made it a symbol of the struggle for democracy and human rights. In 1981, the UN Committee, determined that because Lilián had been victim of “arbitrary arrest and detention,” because she had been “kept incommunicado for four months,” because she had “had no counsel of her own choosing,” and had not been “tried without undue delay,” the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights had been violated. The State of Uruguay had an obligation to provide Lilián “with effective remedies, including her immediate release, permission to leave the country and compensation for the violations which she had suffered...” (United Nations 1981). Lilián was released from prison in 1983.

¹² In these gatherings, “women engaged in feminist practices” met to exchange opinions and experiences, identify problems, and strategize. Both *feministas* and *militantes* agreed that women, most acutely poor women, suffered *specific* oppression. Yet, *feministas* claimed that feminism was “the first real alternative for the total transformation of oppressive social relations in Latin America” and as such needed a movement independent from institutionalized parties. *Militantes* believed that feminist goals neither could nor should be separated from class struggle and advocated “organic autonomy” but not a separate political space for feminists (Saporta Sternbach et al. 1992).

¹³ According to Alvarez, the self critique pointed out the state-centric strategies that seemed to have responded more to a patriarchal cultural logic than to alternative feminist worldviews (Alvarez 1998, 311).

¹⁴ Ocampo and de Cicco, *Entrevista con Lilián Celiberti*, January 27, 2005. See http://www.rimaweb.com.ar/feminismos/lilian_celiberti_dialogos.html.

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