OF *MATE*, MEN AND THE MILITARY:
Narrating (About) Effective Resistance

> All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivious, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives.[1]

A politically empowered military radically changed the historic course and national identity of Uruguay, previously Latin America's most peaceful welfare state. The conversion of Uruguay from a nation proud of 70 years of benevolent democracy to an authoritarian jailer of one in five citizens took a mere three years. Although the Uruguayan social fabric had been deteriorating due to a spiraling foreign debt, high unemployment and a shift in state tutelage away from a complacent middle class toward an increasingly numerous and politicized proletariat, the final tear occurred on June 27, 1973. The National Assembly dissolved itself placing the state in the hands of a military longing for a return to the less chaotic, less diverse, insular and tranquil Uruguayan nation of yesteryear. The single-minded thoroughness and zeal with which the military took to restoring the nation to its imagined past stunned an apathetic middle class. Covert torture, kidnaping, murder, disappearances and "therapeutic" incarcerations became the quotidian. The authoritarian and xenophobic military penetrated all aspects of public and private life looking to root out foreign (read Communist) ideas.[2] The military's role as guarantor of sovereign geographic borders grew to include ideological territory. The nation's self-identity and international reputation would be forever changed.[3]

While the military officially touted a messianic Christian message of purity, it simultaneously disregarded basic human rights in order to "dictate" a new Uruguayan reality. Even today portions of society would prefer to forget, bury, and cover-up the atrocities committed in the name of the *Proceso*, as the authoritarian's program was termed. The culture of fear that the military was able to generate turned the object of authoritarian domination—an "infiltrated"

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1 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London, Verso, 1991; p. 204.

2 For a discussion of the social repercussions of State intervention see Carina Perelli, "Youth, Politics and Dictatorship" in Juan E. Corradi, Patricia Weiss Fagen and Manuel Antonio Garretón (eds.), *Fear at the Edge: State Terror and Resistance in Latin America*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992.

3 See The International League for Human Rights, *Uruguay's Human Rights Record: Comments, Analysis and Background Information on the Government of Uruguay's 1982 Report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee*, December 1982.

citizenry—into its own best censor and controller. Yet out of this attempted discursive control, resistance narratives emerged to correct the military's imposed reality. Conflated in this desire to narrate a less "official" Uruguayan history are concepts of national, public and personal identity. Components of social and individual identity such as class, gender, religion, and/or political affiliation became the subject matter of not a few books that attempt to restore memory to a formerly enforced amnesia. This "situational consciousness ... where the telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the collectivity itself," to invoke Jameson's notion, was narrated in *testimonies* and novels attempting to resist authoritarian discursive control.[4]

My intention in this article is to discuss some of the ways that the ritual act of drinking *mate*—an idiosyncratic activity indigenous to the River Plate—is a mythic and performative act used literarily to reveal the fundamental immorality, the nationalistic malignancy and the gendered nature of the discursive and coercive practices of the military that controlled the Uruguayan state in the 70s. To launch this discussion, I will discuss, in turn, José Calace's *Quince años en el infierno*, Wladimir Turiansky's *Apuntes contra la desmemoria: Recuerdos de la Resistencia* and Marta Traba's *Conversación al sur*. The first two narratives are *testimonios* published post-dictatorship that attempt to rectify the "official" history of authoritarian Uruguay. Calace's narrative records various male bonding rituals through which the military recruited mostly adolescent males from marginalized sectors of society. Promises of future power combined with a heroic vision of their imminent patriotic role in history induced many to join in the military's cause—including Calace. Turiansky's *testimonio* documents the political prisoners' experience of state terrorism largely determined by the military's patriarchal configuration. Both books relate horrifying torture scenes in which the sipping and sharing of a communal *mate* becomes a male bonding ritual—a performance—that evokes a gauchesque masculine dignity and honors national myths. The last book I will discuss is a realist novel published nearly seven years earlier outside of Uruguay's national borders—outside of its sphere of discursive control. Mothers, in *Conversación al sur* drink coffee while examining their lives and exploring their experiences in private settings. It is when these women leave the private and venture into the public sphere alone, a character in the novel interrupts a man's late night *mate*, that a metaphorical disturbance of the *Proceso*'s dictated traditional reality occurs. All three narratives contain pivotal scenes in which drinking *mate*, as a nationally emblematic performative act, sheds light on the character of the

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[4] In his article "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15, (Fall 1986), 65-88. Jameson also terms Third World literature "national allegory" in his article. See Jean Franco, "The Nation as Imagined Community" in H. Aram Veeser (ed.), *The New Historicism, New* York, Routledge, 1989; pp. 204-212 for a response to his generalizing label. ·

struggles for state control. Integrated in this single act of sharing *mate* are gendered notions of nation, state, control, and power. Sipping *mate* becomes a revealing cultural nexus that sheds light on writing effective resistance literature; a type of writing that resists taking on the oppositional role both necessary to and "dictated" by controlling authoritarians; a type of writing that resists the dictator's dialectic and creates new, unplanned for spaces of resistance. Some narratives, such as Calace's, play the authoritarian's game and act as oppositional foils. Others, like Turiansky's, have some inkling of what effective resistance might be yet cannot shake the military's male mythos of nation. Traba's narrative, however, posits action outside of the oppositional dialectic that the dictator's discourse promotes. This is effective resistance.

Male bonding and the military

José Calace's *Quince años en el infierno*[5] has the notoriety of being the only *testimonio* written by an agent of the "Departamento 6 de la Dirección de Información e Inteligencia"—Uruguay's secret police. Published in 1986 well after the 1980 plebiscite rejecting the military's "Nueva República" agenda and the resulting 1984 general elections limiting the military's participation in Uruguay's political arena, Calace's exposé has a dual goal, each of which corresponds to aspects of the *testimonio*: the self and the self in context. He sees his goals as both self-serving and valuable to society at large. As he explicitly states in two epigraphs, "Por mi familia, por mi honor" and "Este libro tiene la premura de un grito. Es para que mi pueblo sepa la verdad. Por eso no tiene prólogo" (Calace 3 and 5). Calace fears being considered a traitor by his former colleagues and resorts to trite references to patriotism in order to shield himself. Simultaneously he is admitting his guilt as a traitor by publishing a book describing his involvement in the dictatorship's illegal activities. In order to survive in Uruguayan society "extra muros," there is an implied and inherent complicity with the authoritarian regime. Between witness and accomplice there is only the grey area of mediated discourse.

Calace is both victim and victimizer, witness and accomplice. In his childhood surrounded by an incipient authoritarian power, he was seduced into believing in the Right of a Manichean, right versus wrong ideology. As an adult, he collaborates with the dictatorship which passes itself off as benevolent father. Calace sides with the words of privilege and patriotism officially expressed by the military. In a speech at the May 18, 1978, official celebration of the "Batalla de Las Piedras" and "Día del Ejército," General Julio C. Rapela explains the logic of military intervention in Uruguay:

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[5] José Calace, *Quince años en el infierno*, Montevideo, Tupac Amaru, 1988.

> La profesión militar no es una profesión más entre otras. Constituye un verdadero estado, un espíritu y un estilo de vida que define una vocación de servicio a la patria y sus inmutables esencias y valores (Los militares) en circunstancias de amargo recuerdo para el país, decididos a salvar la República que se desplomaba, envuelta en el caos, la corrupción y la disolución social, toman participación en la conducción de la cosa pública y asumen el compromiso de devolver a la nación su paz y tranquilidad, su bienestar económico, su libertad de pensamiento y expresión.[6]

Paternalistic military regimes understand society as having members aligned as either "amigos de la patria" that actively serve the public interest or subversive communist enemies bent on destroying national strength through divisive violence. Cohesion and uniformity is strength while diversity is deformity. There is a xenophobic fear of the "other." This positivistic view of nation as species posits stability and conformity as self-evident truth for strength and durability. Any foreign (read communist) ideas daring assimilation, perhaps causing an imprecision of national identity, threaten "homo uruguay," the Uruguayan body politic. Precepts 19 and 20 of the educator's creed, published in a 1978 edition of the "El Soldado" magazine, state: "19. Creo que para las toxinas marxistas, el mejor anticuerpo es una correcta educación. 20. Creo que la major garantía de las Libertades es el orden y la disciplina" (As quoted in Caetano and Rilla 74).

Calace's indoctrination began during his adolescence. The military had yet to install its programs in the public schools but it did have after school paramilitary groups for young men sponsored by the Department of Information and Intelligence and the Colorado Party. Calace remembers his innocence,

> A los 14 ingresé al liceo Las Piedras. Dos amigos de barrio, un tal Minsky y Juan Alberto Morales, se habían integrado a la JUP (Juvented Uruguaya de Pie) y, porque eran amigos y porque era una emocionante aventura acepté su invitación y también me integré. No fueron otros, al principio, los motivos. No estaba "formado" ideológicamente... . Para nosotros era como una novela. Nos sentíamos los 007 del Uruguay. (Calace 10-11)

But in retrospect, after several "operations," he laments, "¡Tenía que haberme dado cuenta en ese tiempo, qué clase de gente eran!" (Calace 11). Yet, "Esa ideología [las ideas fascistas, los nazis] proporciona un fuerte sentimiento de seguridad: —Vas a tener *poder*; contarás siempre con el apoyo del *poder*..." In conclusion, Calace warns, "Hoy se sigue haciendo lo mismo" (Calace 11, emphasis his). This short vignette near the beginning of his *testimonio* reveals Calace's paradoxical discursive stance as victim, accomplice and witness.

Calace's story of victimization is substantiated by other accounts of expe-

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[6] As quoted in Gerardo Caetano and José Rilla, *Breve historia de la dictadura* (1973-1985), Montevideo, Centro Latinoamericano de Economía Humana-Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1987; pp. 71-2.

riences in Uruguay's educational system. The following is testimony from a student given January 25, 1985, in Jaque:

> Me gustaría poder explicarte bien el clima de esa escuela. Hay algo muy viejo, que viene de la segunda guerra mundial, que es el lavado de cerebro. Esto tiene dos partes para atacar, el físico y la mente. Una vez que la persona está debilitada en su físico y en su mente, podés inyectarle cualquier idea. Así funcionaba la escuela. La disciplina se fue haciendo más rígida. Y en los años en que estuvo de director el Gral. Ballestrino se llegó los momentos de mayor rigidez. Fueron años muy particulares. La biblioteca se llenó de libros antijudíos, de nazismo, antimasones. Había pruebas muy distintas. El aspirante que recién llegaba, con 18 años, lo llevaban al campo y le daban orden que matara a un gato con el puñal o la bayoneta. Allí mismo, de golpe. Muchos no lo soportaron y se fueron. Otros lo hicieron. (Caetano and Rilla 75)

Calace's excuses for complicity with the regime find corroboration in this and other Uruguayan citizen's attestations to life during dictatorship. Yet as the student's recollections show, not all hopefuls were able to stomach the induction ceremonies. Some refused to participate in spite of promised future power. Calace, however, continues his justifications, making the case that, "El soldado y el policía son de abajo. Nacen abajo. La enorme mayoría están allí por necesidad. Hay que hacerse preguntas. Nos prometieron la victoria: que los de abajo íbamos a estar mejor. Que el país iba a avanzar. Yo me hacía matar por esas ideas." (Calace 85-6).

Juan Rial explains the transition of Uruguayan military strategy from the myth of a middle class social contract to a promise of greater equality for Calace's poorer, more marginalized sectors of society.

> In contrast to the Batllist state, the new dictatorial state did not seek to maintain a tutelar relationship with the middle sectors or with the organized working class. Instead, it opted to protect some marginal sectors of society—the lumpenproletariat that had been a traditional reserve pool for the recruitment of military personnel. These political pariahs found a voice through the spokesmen of the armed forces... . The new system projected an image at marginal sectors of Montevideo and provincial cities, which now replaced the traditional middle sectors as the main beneficiaries of state policies.[7]

Yet, the disproportionate majority of lower and less educated classes of Uruguay's social stratification represented in the police forces hardly justifies the repugnant actions and situations Calace failed to report before the dictatorship's decline. In the context of a later more democratic Uruguay, the discursive boundaries became less authoritarian, less black and white, and Calace came to see himself as a victim of circumstance.

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[7] Juan Rial, "Makers and Guardians of Fear: Controlled Terror in Uruguay" in Juan E. Corradi, Patricia Weiss Fagen and Manuel Antonio Garretón (eds.),*Fear at the Edge: State Terror and Resistance in Latin America*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992; pp. 92-3.

Calace recognizes his complicity with the regime yet attempts to use its own words against it by citing a brutality which had no place, at least in his mind, in the regime's greater purpose—to recreate a just and democratic Uruguay. While eliminating destructive forces from the social fabric was desirable, the terrorism was extreme. His acknowledged complicity and straightforward testimony of illegality pits the questionable credibility of his truth versus the credibility of a military willing to stop at nothing. Calace's narrative has little more oppositional effect than the aphoristic "exception that proves the rule." He would like to be remembered as one of many patriotic functionaries caught up in the dictatorial machine of necessary complicity. Calace laments the fact that the extreme Right became synonymous with the *Proceso*. As he concludes, "¿Por qué hago esto? ... (No) lo hago para perjudicar en algo el proceso —vital— de democratización plena que mi país necesita; sólo a la extrema derecha le interesa hoy la corrupción y armar lío. Sólo ella vive pensando en eso" (Calace 84). The defense of his personal honor, a discredited military and a subsequent alteration in power produced this narrative. It is Uruguay's political environment that has changed Calace's position in society, not his beliefs. Calace's *testimonio* tells the truthful tale of a naive citizen whose patriotic goals were deformed through male bonding rituals conflating torture and patriotism by a military power bent on transforming a culture into a manageable and easily controllable likeness of itself.

Mate and masculinity

Wladimir Turiansky, however, is keenly aware of the changing political scene and takes for granted that as various ideologies take power, his place in society will change. His *testimonio, Apuntes contra la desmemoria: Recuerdos de la Resistencia*,[8] confirms, like Calace's, what was always suspected, but avoids the blindness of Calace's outrage at the post-authoritarian criminal accusations pointed at him as an accomplice in what he sees as the *Proceso*'s necessary measures for democratization —"Estábamos intentando barrer con una cultura" (Calace 58). Turiansky is more politically sophisticated than Calace, having published two previous books, *La UTE y la crisis nacional* in 1964 and *El movimiento obrero uruguayo* in 1973. He views his almost ten years of incarceration (from 27 June 1975 to 1 March 1985) as a grim time of introspection and reflection for understanding the mistakes of the political Left. Turiansky's self-critical narrative contrasts with Calace's self-absorbed "a posteriori" denouncements.

Turiansky shows himself to be aware of language and its discursive properties when considering memory and veracity, collective and personal history,

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[8] Wladimir Turiansky, *Apuntes contra la desmemoria: Recuerdos de la Resistencia*, Montevideo, Arca, 1988.

and truth and actuality. He speaks to a reading public that endured the dictatorship outside prison walls. The only segment of history he is able to recount is of the prison's "inside" rather than confessions and confirmations of clandestine military activities like Calace's *Quince años en el infierno*. Turiansky does not profess to reveal, contradict, and denounce an "official" history because he has no direct knowledge of life outside Libertad's walls.[9] The few contacts he did have with family members who offered words of hope were suspect: "Nosotros siempre fuimos cautos en materia de expectativas. Siempre había una zona en que no sabíamos si el familiar reflejaba más o menos objetivamente la realidad o trataba de inyectarnos un algo de esperanza para hacer más llevadera nuestra situación" (Turiansky 85). Turiansky intuits that believing words of hope is dangerous in a "dictated" society. He understands the mediated nature of words, their complicity in the power structure, their duplicity. While there is nothing he would rather believe than that authoritarian oppression were lifting, he cannot be sure that the words are not more than pleasantries, or worse, a calculated maneuver by the military to give the superficial appearance that oppression was lifting. Unlike Calace's memoir, Turiansky's narrative does not fall prey to the dream of "dictation."

Calace's text is authoritarian, partaking of the dictatorial system of discourse, in that it relies on the reader to identify with the narration of his victimization. He requires, at least implicitly, that the reader understand that the whole of society must recognize its double role as agent and victim. Calace reproduces the authoritarian model of discursive control that he claims victimized him as an adolescent and consequently passes it on to his readers. Just as he believed in promises of power and success made by leaders of the *Juventud Uruguaya de Pie* in exchange for his complicity, he asks his reader to accept unconditionally the truth of his story and recognize his/her own complicity in dictation's system.

Turiansky's narrative and its dramatic framing tell the "truth" from a more oblique and mediated discursive stance. His *testimonio* begins and ends as he sits in the prison's administrative offices, signing papers and awaiting his release. He is neither prisoner nor civilian. From this space that is neither "inside" nor "outside," this portal in-between the antagonistic forces of oppressor and oppressed, Turiansky tries to establish a discursive stance of objectivity. He wants to diminish his role as participant and emphasize what he considers a less discursively committed, more objective position; that of on-looker. Turiansky further distances himself from the role of participant by using language generally reserved for describing dramatic literature. In the introduction, for example, he speaks of *episodes, dialogues* and his *peripecia personal*.

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[9] Libertad is Uruguay's largest prison. The irony of its name has been lost on only a few. However, it should also be pointed out that it was built in the 19th century as a "correctional" institution. See Michel Foucault, Alan Sheridan (trans.), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York: Vintage, 1977).

Later in the narrative he describes his trial as a *farce.* There is a sense of victimization in his personal *comedy* that extrapolates to all those living an unavoidable complicity in the inside/outside dichotomy of society's structure under dictation. He includes himself in the *farce* with his use of the first person plural, "éramos conscientes del grado de **farsa**" (Turiansky 18, bold mine), but he also establishes a historical distance (the past tense) and a critical consciousness apart, as if viewing instead of participating in the recounted episode. And it is not only Turiansky's narrated life that is played out as drama but history itself.

> No hay más remedio que aceptar, entonces, que para sus *protagonistas*, febrero del 73 y junio del 73 son la misma cosa, que entre el 9 de febrero y el 27 de junio no hay *ruptura* sino *continuidad*. (Turiansky 24, emphasis mine)[10]

Within Turiansky's framing of the narrative, however, there are many erosions that undermine his intended objective positioning as on-looker. Turiansky clearly and necessarily aligns himself with the "inside" and oppressed. He even suggests that he is in a privileged spot to observe the military, "parafraseando a Martí, ahí estábamos, en el interior del monstruo examinado su entrañas" (Turiansky 60). The narrator's voice in Turiansky's text continually shifts inside the narrative frame from objective on-looker to oppressed insider and back.

While these shifts negate some of the effectiveness of his strategy to appear objective, it also provides Turiansky with a certain freedom to ponder what he considers to be important social questions that bridge the inside/outside dichotomy of prison literature. In fact, the isolation of prison life, which is not absolute since it participates as a necessary complement in opposition to "public" life, has taught him to contemplate.

> En cuanto a las conclusiones, decidimos dejar que la vida diera sus respuestas. Hay que decir que tratamos que ese fuera un estilo para exámenes. No apresurarse a elaborar síntesis. Si no fuera porque suele darse a los que voy a decir un sentido un tanto despectivo, tratar de "rumiar" ideas. Fue una buena práctica. A mí me ayudó mucho a desembarazarme de la tendencia a la formación de casilleros, a una clasificación de las ideas ajenas que casi siempre termina por despojarlas de su complejidad y de su riqueza. Tal vez sea una buena experiencia del mundo "de adentro," aplicable al mundo "de afuera". (Turiansky 75)

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[10] He is referring to military press releases of 9 February 1973 called "Comunicados 4 y 7" that promised military intervention in the political process would, among other things, eliminate foreign debt, eradicate unemployment, and redistribute land more equitably. The Boisso-Lanza pact, signed a few days later by President Bordaberry and the military ratified the "comunicados" and promised to "mantener el régimen institucional vigente, con elecciones en 1976" (Caetano and Rilla 35). The Left has concluded that the "comunicados" and the Pact seem to have been subterfuge since Bordaberry dissolved Congress in June of 1973. The debate continues as to whether the "comunicados" were calculated appeasements for the Left or a product of Uruguay's political evolution toward authoritarianism.

The quotation suggests that his suffering in prison was in some ways beneficial. In contrast to the authoritarian black and white of political discourse, he comes to appreciate otherness as a celebratory and meaningful democratic diversity.

In other scenes, the dichotomy "inside/outside" disappears revealing the horrors that the military as oppressor committed against the oppressed Uruguayan collective identity. The "inside/outside" dichotomy falls away to highlight the hypocrisy of a supposedly benevolent and patriotic regime isolated from the cultural roots of the nation it governs.

> Estoy de plantón. Creo que me han puesto un poncho. Las manos a la espalda, y las esposas, que no me las han quitado desde que llegué, están tan apretadas, que al dolor se agrega ahora la sensación que los brazos cuelgan como dos pesos muertos de los hombros. Alguien toma mate cerca mío. Siento, casi a mi lado, el clásico ruido de la bombilla al finalizar. Y de inmediato, así, de improviso, un puñetazo al estómago que me deja, unos instantes, sin aire. Otra vez el ruido del mate. Otra vez el golpe. A veces dos. O tres. De pronto creo que me rodean varios, y entonces recibo una verdadera lluvia de golpes. Procuro no caer, aunque no sé bien por qué. Ya entiendo lo del poncho. Debe ser, me digo, para no dejar marcas. ¿Cómo se puede, me pregunto, tomar mate y golpear de esa manera, a un tipo vendado, esposado, absolutamente indefenso? Pienso que el mate de alguna manera se asocia con la dignidad y la hombría del gaucho, y lo que estoy viviendo me resulta aberrante, incomprensible. (Turiansky 26)

The collective essence of Uruguayan society seen in the national symbols of *mate*, dignity and the brave gaucho is contrasted with the terrorism of the empowered regime. The prisoners "inside," the officially subversive, identify and are identified with the autochthonous symbols of Uruguayan society at large on the "outside" leaving the military actions to be termed aberrant and alien to the nation. Yet both the nationally emblematic activity of sharing *mate* and the camaraderie of torture teams are male bonding rituals; again the "inside/outside" dichotomy dissolves but this time emphasizing the homosocial[11] nature of discourses of power.

The rhetorical objectivity of Turiansky's narrative stance comes to symbolize the lack of correspondence between society's concerns and a national identity. The government's machinations for creating a *Nueva República* that hypocritically extolled the possession of *orientalidad* alienated its citizens. The implicitly understood "inside/outside" dichotomy of good versus evil (those members of society imprisoned must be evil) is replaced by the dichotomy of society versus government due to the military's hypocrisy and the resulting loss of trust in government by Uruguayan citizens. Society is, in essence, exiled

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11 See the introduction to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1985; pp. 1-20.

from participation in a national culture with any meaning.[12]

The various truths that the *testimonios* tell are the product of homosocial relationships. The following torture scene presented from Calace's book dramatically illustrates the patriarchal and hierarchical activity of the torturer that is almost invariably male.

> Vaz, el primer picana de la DII, comenzó a lucir su virtuosismo delante de Ballestrino. El cuerpo desnudo y mojado se retorcía. —¿Quién te ordenó hacer esta historia? —¿No sabés que ella es un atentado contra la moral de un tipo como Morán? En voz muy baja todos comentábamos que Morán "era flor de delincuente" pero igual nos sentíamos agredidos por aquel cuento... . En determinado momento hubo que parar: el escritor tenía un testículo monstruosamente hinchado. Mientras Medina Ramos lo revisaba, Vaz, jadeando, me pidió que le tuviera la picana: una antena de radio conectada a un enchufe. Yo, que todavía era "nuevo", toqué con ella sin querer al inspector Recoba, quien estaba acomodando plácidamente su mate. Ante la risa generalizada se vio volar al inspector, al mate y al termo junto con el alarido... Sentí miedo. (Calace 16-17)

Calace only feels fear when he inadvertently applies the *picana* to his superior officer who consequently "let's fly" his *mate* and thermos. This event points first to Calace's solidarity with the patriarchal, hierarchical ordering of society. His clumsiness disturbs the established Uruguayan political status quo by applying the preferred instrument of power and torture to the oppressor. The phallic *picana* as instrument of torture and symbol of power, was fundamental in producing the culture of fear Uruguayan society endured in the hands of a military desiring to maintain social order through both rhetorical and physical intimidation.[13] The *picana* metonymically came to represent the military as a controlling, patriarchal and patriotic force. Calace's narration of the torture session that takes place in the patio area reserved for holiday *asados*—the traditional River Plate barbecue with an abundance of beef (in this case the carcass is human)—shows a characteristic lack of concern for the tortured subject. The traditional role of female passivity and marginalization converts the tortured subject into an object—the premise for an instructional gathering. The narrator's fear is not caused by the near death of the tortured prisoner Nelson Marra but the threat to order in a specifically River Plate setting—the *parrillero*—brought about by the spilling of *mate* and thermos—another emblem of *orientalidad*. The fact that the audience to this torture session —the "informative spectacle"—boisterously regards the accident with good

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12 See Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form" in Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, New York, Routledge, 1990; pp. 44-70.

13 See Chapter Four, "In the Name of the Father," in Frank Graziano, *Divine Violence: Spectacle, Psychosexulaity and Radical Christianity in the Argentine "Dirty War,"* Boulder, Westview Press, 1992.

humor lends a sort of legitimacy to the group's activity. Calace's inadvertent reversal of the electroshock's target, from oppressed to oppressor, corresponds to inversions represented in scenes of physical humor. In cartoons, for instance, the Coyote's sadistic strategies to eliminate the bothersome Roadrunner always figuratively and sometime literally blow up in his face. The event and its resulting inversion of power served as a comic yet grotesque interlude to an otherwise hum-drum night of camaraderie among torturers. Group action and the oppression of marginal or subservient classes have a long history in the gendering of males and are accepted as natural in contexts such as fraternity initiations, paramilitary and revolutionary cell inductions and hazings.[14] Judith Butler posits that gender is a performative act without stable origins that needs repetition to give itself an illusory legitimacy. For her, gender is a sort of necessary "drag" presented constantly to a public.[15] The viewing public of the torture scene accepts the performance as a natural and legitimate re-enactment of domination and of bonding in power over the "other." The insistence on torturing the victim's testicle with the controlling phallus/*picana* also suggests that this is a homosocial, man versus man, gendering activity that was part and parcel of the political oppression suffered by Uruguayan society, metonymically represented by the *mate* and allegorically taking place in the *parrillero*. However, it is also true that Calace and his colleagues in torture realize that what they are watching is a performance re-enacting and replaying the power-system's functioning. The severity of the torture has little correspondence to the victim's crime of alluding in writing to a member of the armed forces (who the public knows to be at least a delinquent if not a specialist in working the oppressive system to his personal advantage). Furthermore, the military mind cannot comprehend the possibility that one could act alone and have a personal, individual opinion. This kind of military, group logic expressed by the question, "Who made you write the story?," asks for information about the identities of Marra's co-conspirators. Ironically, it would appear that the answers to the torturers' questions have little importance. Mention of the efficacy of coercing Marra to squeal does not appear in the text. The purpose of the torture then becomes not to extract information but a ritual exorcising of a military paranoia produced by their procedural illegitimacy. The ritual simultaneously confirmed and naturalized the power-system. Vaz's frenzied, sweaty attack on Marra's genitalia while screaming for the annihilation of the ideologues belies the frustration of a military attempting to homogenize the popu-

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[14] The best Latin American literary treatment of male group initiation and its corresponding societal influences in a Peruvian setting is Mario Vargas Llosa, *La ciudad y los perros*, Barcelona, Seix Barral, 1963.

[15] See her article "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" in Diane Fuss (ed.), *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, New York, Routledge, 1991, or her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York, Routledge, 1990.

lace it governed. It belies a regime reduced to the repetition of sadistic torture scenes of overtly phallic homosocial power-brokering to attempt to engender a normalcy, naturalness and legitimacy to their undeniably immoral acts.

Turiansky is conscious of his truthful tale's omission of women's experience in captivity. He acknowledges his ignorance of his female counterpart's fate at the women's prison at Punta Rieles in the apologetic introduction to his *testimonio*. The book offers little insight into a revolutionary woman's doubly marginal role in the status quo of a patriarchal "official" Uruguayan society, but his torture does reveal the gendered identity of Turiansky's resistance truth. When he states that his thought process has lost some of its orientation as the shortest path on the way to a specific goal—perhaps glossing important subtleties, nuance and complexities of the points of view from others (meaning of little importance to the brokering of interpretive power in a homosocial society)—he paraphrases what women's studies theorists have argued quite contentiously are "women's ways of knowing." As a military's socially constructed subversive man suffering the oppression of a patriarchal regime, a resistant alternative became what some theorists have posited as a woman's discursive style and gendered way of thought and problem resolution. Turiansky's experience of torture and his description of it also fits into the man oppressor/ woman oppressed paradigm.

In an essential way, torture and extreme pain, according to Elaine Scarry, destroys personal identity.[16] Gender is a fundamental element of an individual's self-identity thereby inextricably linking torture and gender. In order to dismantle resisting subjects most effectively and efficiently, guards and torturers—almost invariably men—emasculated their male prisoners who were forced to perform stereotypically domestic, quotidian, female duties. These chores of the marginalized female became sites of resistance and were used to breakdown the isolation of the jail cell. Turiansky points to kitchen duty as a particularly good opportunity to pass information along to prisoners of other cell blocks. This was effective resistance. Male gendered resistance, seen in the torture scene that Turiansky reports in his *testimonio*, displays a contestatory—rather than a mediatory—resistance which fails because it is precisely the adversarial relationship that the torturer understands best. Women's spaces are passed over in the authoritarian scheme as inconsequential.

After repeated blows to Turiansky's poncho-covered thorax—a first reference to the gaucho as Uruguayan national symbol—his torturers sip *mate*—another nationally emblematic activity. He is blindfolded, cuffed and absolutely defenseless during the session—the quintessential subaltern—and metaphorically speaking, a female. Yet, instead of acknowledging the defenselessness of his situation and searching for alternative avenues of resistance, he

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[16] Most pertinent to this notion of the deconstruction of the world is "Chapter One" in her *The Body in Pain*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1985; pp. 27-59.

contests the blows and tries not to fall, although he is not sure why. Falling, caving in to the oppressor, is antithetical to male gendering and their accustomed dominance. Even more interesting is that Turiansky focuses not on the illegitimacy of the physical pain of the torture but the affront to the mythically structured masculinity and dignity of the gaucho. His culturally held, almost sacred belief in the masculine dignity of the gaucho is battered. Turiansky's observation brings to light important qualities of resistance. First the futility of resistance to power-systems in which the oppressed plays the role prescribed to it by the oppressor and second the fundamental importance of gender as a resistance category. Female spaces are ignored in homosocial authoritarian regimes. In order to change the power-system, fundamental changes in constructing gender must accompany political agendas in order to avoid switching only the ruler's desk top nameplate.

Female spaces of resistance

Marta Traba's book *Conversación al sur*[17] further examines resistance and its gendered properties. The conversation to which the title alludes takes place in Montevideo at the famous and successful actress Irene's summer home. As the protagonists speak, they reveal the physical and psychological ravages suffered personally, by their family members and the family with which they share an acquaintance. Irene's son is incommunicado in Chile after Pinochet's coup. She is alone in Montevideo because of her businessman husband's financial decision to remain far from possible entanglements with the Southern Conets sociopolitical instability. Dolores also lives alone after her husband's death at the hands of his jailers, the miscarriage of their first child after being stomped on while interrogated for political activities, and because of her own feelings of guilt and rage towards her parents' indifference to the criminality of the ruling junta. Elena has taken refuge in her missing daughter's bohemian apartment far from her posh penthouse address and joined the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo after her husband and son in a sense guaranteed her daughter Victoria's death. The traditional conception of hearth and home is wholly absent from Traba's novel. In fact, an entirely new set of relationships form to take up the vacuum left by the protagonists 'families' disintegration. The novel's focus is on independent women who live alone and speak for themselves and who maintain supportive ties with other women to replace the human need for protection from a hostile environment.

Traba's aim is not the allegorical countering of official discourse that justified the invasion of spaces once thought private, but the resulting relationships formed as a consequence of state intervention in the private sphere. As the family's ability to provide safe haven from the difficulties of public life

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17 Marta Traba, *Conversación al sur*, México, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1981.

shrank, the need for such respite grew and new social relationships were formed to fill the vacuum. These new relationships were a force unimagined by the dictatorships. They were in a sense ungovernable and outside the dictatorial dream of a controlling discourse: these relationships were oppositional and they were resistant. Power depends on its opposition to function; opposition justifies the existence of a powerful, and in this case, intrusive authoritarian state. The intrusion of the state into the previously traditional private female space of the home paradoxically produces not only additional oppositional voices, but both public criticism of the regime and newly conceived of "family" formations that escaped scrutiny and unmasked the hypocrisy of repressive military acts.

Traba examines the female oppositional voice in a wrenching scene depicting a Plaza de Mayo protest in the heart of the *porteño* urban sprawl. Irene accompanies her long time friend Elena to the Plaza de Mayo in order to protest the disappearance of her daughter. The demonstrations of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo are paradoxically the product of the state's insistence on the strength of family ties and their primordial relationship to social order. The marching mothers are fulfilling their maternal roles as protective caretakers of the children. Jean Franco proposes that the presence of the mothers in the Plaza de Mayo has served to alter the meaning of "mother" in the River Plate context.[18] The paternal *Proceso* that usurped discursive individuality in the royal "we" found its match in these mothers who as a new kind of empowered citizenry spoke collectively of the state's actual destruction of the traditional family. The Madres de la Plaza de Mayo place the state's will and the concept of family at odds by using the military's rhetoric against itself.

Official discourse mandated the maintenance of the traditional family complete with caring mother as a requirement for stabilizing the perceived chaos of the Argentine sociopolitical scene. The intention of the message was to espouse a model of quietism, stability and moral responsibility in the home and to emphasize the threat that subversives posed to nurturing maternal embraces. The tranquility of family life, however, was less evidently being destroyed by subversives than by the state itself. The Madres de la Plaza de Mayo protested the destruction of their families but paradoxically struck back at the very source of the voice instructing them to protect family life.

Traba keeps writing of Irene and Dolores's conversation. Traba provides a first person narrative voice for her principal interlocutors that alternates with a third person omniscient voice accompanying both Irene and Dolores. As their conversation unfolds, the retrospection provided by the omniscient voice serves

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18 Jean Franco, "Beyond Ethnocentrism: Gender, Power and the Third World Intelligentsia" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1988; p. 514.

to actualize past horrors while simultaneously relating the incidents at arm's length, in a dispassionate tone. This distancing of the tragedies befallen the portrayed families not only infuses Dolores and Irene's conversation with an emotional depth but animates the text with a sense of the protagonist's feelings of persecution, ostracism, and confusion when conversing about their lives in the present.

Traba's chatty and fluid narrative style easily fuses Dolores and Irene's dialogue with an omniscient ongoing critique of the content of the protagonists' conversation. The topic of Irene's and Dolores's conversation, the latter's experience of being arrested for participation in a subversive operation, indicts Dolores as an accomplice in the dictatorial scheme of absolute power. Her actions and resulting experience prove the existence of oppositional elements in society and, at least in military logic, justifies the necessity of repressive tactics to eliminate those who threaten the stability of the state. Irene's double reaction of shock at Dolores's nonchalance and of dismay at the unsuitability of her topic for what she expects in casual, formulaic conversation also underscores the nostalgic desirability of a bygone era that the military would like to see maintained. During the *Proceso*, the parameters of proper conversational exchanges were altered and the invasion of atrocities committed by the state into the private also meant that what had previously been appropriate in public took refuge behind the closed doors of privacy. Lamenting changes that had taken place in the parameters of pleasant conversation does not merely oppose military control, but serves as a critique of the effects of its attempt to control private spaces.

The omniscient voice also allows for a sarcasm that functions oppositionally in the novel. As with irony, "a special kind of substitute for silence, (t)he word removed from life: the word of an idiot, the holy fool, the insane, the child, the dying person, and sometimes women,"[19] sarcasm only functions when the reader knows the context of the remarks made. To understand the crude and taunting wit of the narrator's sarcasm the reader as appellated simultaneously complies with the narrator's view and gives in to his/her desire to be desired as narratee, to belong to the group that understands the sarcasm, and thus, relinquishes part of his/her freedom of interpretation. Sarcasm, like the Madres (mis)reading of state discourse, depends on the existence of an "official" voice mandating a specific vision of the world known to all. Traba's sarcasm is oppositional because it demands awareness of both the politics of constructing a national identity (the state's discourse) and the experientially confirmed reality that it hides. The power system has been exposed for examination and criticism. The silence of complicity is filled with the words of women critical of the regime.

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[19] Mikhail Bakhtin, Caryl Emerson (trans.), *Problems of Dostoevsky s Poetics*, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1984; p. 148.

The sarcasm of the novel's narrative voice also erodes the authoritarian point of view that describes the variety of horrors the two women (and those around them) suffer. Concurrently, the very existence and the intensity of their conversation slowly invites participation and a sharing of the events suffered by a community of women surviving violent dictatorships. They survive by the strength of their public collectivity, as in the Plaza de Mayo, and preserving the home as a private space, "donde las ideas y las conversaciones prosperan, donde las mujeres resisten la vigilancia y crean un asilo provisional."[20] However it is not every home that provides a forum for mutual support and resistance.

Homes where fathers and daughters found themselves on opposite sides of the political spectrum are torn apart. This situation has two consequences that create spaces of resistance for the women portrayed in Traba's novel. First, it demonstrates an inherent potential of resistance in a woman's voice. By existing in a homosocial society, where the forces in opposition are mule voices, the female voice exists outside of the power-system and is passed over. Public voices which are traditionally male had been silenced except for discourse officially emitted by the state. The vacuum created by this censorship that blurred the dichotomy of private versus public was filled by female voices able to speak. The content of private, traditionally female conversation, much to Irene's dismay (as seen before), became a space for sociopolitical commentary.

Second, the destruction of these homes created a community of households containing only women living alone. With the symbolic, paternal public eye gone, these households became sanctuaries for conversations such as the one narrated in Traba's novel. This situation also allowed for making alternate private alliances among women away from the home. Dolores and Irene's relationship is a case in point. Dolores receives little attention from her mother unless it serves to make her feel even more guilty about her revolutionary ideas and actions. She is bereft and ostracized like Elena and Victoria. She seeks approval from those around her, support for her convictions, confirmation of her self-worth—in short—a sort of maternal nurturing. She finds this affirmation in Irene's vitality, but it confuses her.

> Volver a ver a Irene revolvió a fondo zonas de mi vida que estaban tachadas. Y cada vez que pienso la pasión que sentí al conocerla, me sube la misma oleada de color a la cara. ¿Qué tipo de pasión? ... ¿cómo había podido caer fulminada de amor ante Irene? ¿Por qué alguna que otra compañera se volvía inseparable, si no podía ya vivir sin Enrique? (Traba 135-6)

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20 Francine Masiello, "Cuerpo/presencia: Mujer y estado social en la narrativa argentina durante el proceso militar," *Nuevo Texto Crítico*, Second Semester, 2-4 (1989), 166.

Her place in society's repressive cultural configuration does not mesh with the traditional means of family support, especially after the death of her husband Enrique. Irene recognizes Dolores's need and perceives her as a newborn in need of maternal care. These two women living alone have found each other and formed a relationship resistant to the power system. Irene's son is (at the very least) incarcerated if not dead after Pinochet's take-over and Dolores's family has been torn apart due to an invasion of the dictatorship's mandates. They need each other to erase an emptiness they feel in their lives and eradicate the repression that has shaped them. Dolores and Irene speak and give voice to the injustices perpetrated by a government that has silenced most other opposition. Irene's home is the sanctuary of their relationship resistant to military mandates of silence. As Irene states after the Plaza de Mayo protest, "...hay que hacer de manera que se pueda respirar ¿viste? Porque si no tomás aliento, vos también te morís. Y lo grave ni siquiera es que vos te mueras, sino que les regalás otro muerto" (Traba 92). Irene's home, as the site of a resistant community, is necessary for survival.

Ironically, the end of the novel, besides defining the resistant relationship that Dolores and Irene have formed, also destroys it. Dolores, by leaving the sanctuary of Irene's home, traveling to her parent's residence, and retracing her steps after learning of her father's death, exposes herself to the forces of the public realm. Her activities are considered suspicious and are probably reported to the authorities by her bus driver who is somewhat irked that she interrupts his ceremonial late night *mate*. This interruption of a nationally emblematic activity, sipping *mate*, is symbolic of Dolores's subversive activities. She disrupts the smooth functioning of a publicly dictated patriotic nationalism. And, because of the length of Dolores and Irene's "resistant" conversation and Dolores's subsequent suspicious late night travels, which lead the authorities to Irene's home, the system engulfs both women, their relationship, their sanctuary and most importantly their voices of resistance.

> ... y así quedaron agazapadas en la oscuridad, animales aterrorizados, escuchando cómo saltaban la cerradura de la puerta y cómo golpeaban sonoramente las botas sobre las baldosas de la sala. Después el ruido se acercó y les pareció un raro estruendo un trueno que retumbaba, aunque seguramente no lo era, pero lo cierto es que tapaba todo, el roce del viento afuera, sus respiraciones entrecortadas dentro, los tranquilizadores rumores familiares, el zumbido de la heladera en la cocina. La mujer pensó que se salvaría de ese pánico enoloquecido si lograba percibir algo dentro de su cuerpo, pero por más atención que puso en oírse, no escuchó ni el más leve rumor de vísceras, ni un latido. En ese silencio absoluto, el otro ruido, nítido, despiadado, fue creciendo y, finalmente, las cercó. (Traba 170)

The absolute silence that the women suffer implies not only a lack of voice but also invisibility. This is in contrast to the solidarity the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo showed by making their private losses public in Argentina's principal

square thereby transforming themselves in a new kind of citizen unplanned for in the authoritarian dialectic.[21] The sound that envelopes Dolores and Irene is the *Proceso*'s hegemonic voice enforcing its discursive control. In spite of Traba's attempt to create a community of resistance using the female identity to initiate dialogue about the power system, the textual erosions of sarcasm in the face of authority, and the creation of alternative relationships of mutual support for enduring the atrocities of authoritarian repression, the system prevails.

An integral part of Uruguay's authoritarian system of repression was the patriarchal configuration of morality and integrity that the *Proceso* professed and which enabled the authoritarians to legitimize and validate their violations of human rights. From very early on in Calace's life, male bonding rituals involving promises of power and peer pressure were the training and testing ground for males wishing to become part of an elite and a powerful regime with a discursive "mytho-logic"[22] that supported and justified military intervention in the nation's intellectual and cultural life. Drinking *mate*, a ritual act passed down from the Romantic idealized gaucho of Uruguay's past—a taming force on nature's horizonless pampas—also relies on a male/female dichotomy. Males civilize a passive, fertile yet unforgiving Mother Nature. Upsetting these activities gendered as male-rituals of bonding and nationally iconic activities such as drinking *mate*—taken to be "natural" (and hence also ideological)—result in chaos, thereby validating and legitimizing the military's violations of human rights in the name of order and of preserving the military's conception of the nation it controlled. Spilling *mate* as a result of applying the torturer's prod to the oppressor causes fear; hearing the characteristic gurgle of the *bombilla* as it empties the last drop of water from the *yerba* beckons the tortured Turiansky to challenge the oppressor face-to-face —beckons him to play the oppositional role prescribed to him by the oppressor; interrupting a late night *mate* summons the forces of oppression to annihilate the female resistance of Traba's main characters. By focusing on these literary events, the gendered nature of authoritarian repression in Uruguay is revealed and becomes instructive for readers. Effective resistance is that which refuses to inhabit the space inscribed for opposition in the military's controlling discourse. Resistance transcends military discourse and calls for a new type of citizen to call

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21 See Jean Franco, "Going Public: Reinhabiting the Private," in George Yúdice, Jean Franco and Juan Flores (eds.), *On Edge: The Crisis of Contemporary Latin American Culture, Volume 4: Cultural Politics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1992; pp. 65-83.

22 "Mytho-logic seals and protects itself, it recasts all incriminating data that penetrates it into evidence in the myth's favor, thereby strengthening its hermetic closure and correctness" (Graziano, 45).

for solidarity with other citizens sharing a similar historical experience; others that know the human cost of authoritarianism.[23]

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[23] For further discussion of the relationship between human rights and literary criticism see Hernán Vidal, *Crítica literaria como defensa de los derechos humanos: Cuestión teórica*, Newark, Delaware, Juan de la Cuesta, 1994.