CHAPTER THREE

BECOMING A REVOLUTIONARY INTELLECTUAL (1965-1969)

We were looking for an impossible idealistic solution. The University, as an institution and a cultural expression, cannot be any different than the social base that sustains it.
Lil Milagro Ramírez[1]

Introduction

Entering the University of El Salvador (UES) in 1963, Lil Milagro's medical exam described her as a 17-year-old woman who stood at 4 feet 9 inches and weighed 115 pounds.[2] The description certainly does not suggest the archetypal, not to mention masculine, image of the Latin American revolutionary. Yet, when she began her career in law at the UES, Lil Milagro embarked upon a path of radicalization that would make her a prominent figure in El Salvador's revolutionary vanguard. This chapter follows the metamorphosis of Lil Milagro as she changed from a studious woman aspiring to be a human rights lawyer into a revolutionary willing to sacrifice her life and the lives of others in the name of justice. Through this examination, we will learn about the process of radicalization, the lure of Latin America's revolutionary culture, and how an individual chooses to rebel in the public and private spheres.

Plotting this journey, this chapter looks at three epochs in Lil Milagro's adult life. The early years, 1963 to 1966, show a young woman who remained faithful to her middle class upbringing as she placed education above activism, travel, and even romance.

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[1] Lil Milagro Ramírez, to Mon Petite, AHCPC, no date. Spanish: *La cuestión es que nosotros buscábamos una solución imposible de encontrar por idealista, la Universidad, como institución y expresión cultural, no puede ser diferente de la base social en la que se sustenta.*

[2] Archivo Central Universidad de El Salvador, Fondo Histórico, Facultad de Jurisprudencia y Ciencias Sociales, expediente No 5, 1963.

Coinciding with one of El Salvador's most prosperous decades, Lil Milagro remained politically inactive during this stage of her life.[3] This did not mean that she lacked the desire to participate in politics at the UES. Instead, her decision to be indifferent was the result of a reluctance to embrace the more radical nature of activism at the UES.

From 1966 to 1968, Lil Milagro considered herself a Christian Democrat who believed in the ability of Christian-oriented activists and politicians to create a fair and just society. During this time, she became more involved in teacher movements, student activist groups, and a progressive Catholic movement based loosely on the ideas of liberation theology. These experiences shaped not only her intellectual development and the socialist ideology she would come to embrace, but also forced her to grapple with the dialectic of a Gramsican intellectual who must consider the demands of his/her audience, which in Lil Milagro's case could include the Church, colleagues at the UES, or her parents.

Yet, as El Salvador radicalized so did Lil Milagro. For this reason, the final stage of her young adult life began after her participation in a critical event of Salvadoran history. Commonly known as the ANDES strikes, thousands of educators and concerned citizens took to the streets in 1968 to demand an end to the developmentalist mentality guiding the education system. As the first massive protest in the country since 1932 and led largely by women, these strikes signified the point at which a revolutionary culture began to emerge in El Salvador. After participating in this moment, Lil Milagro's worldview continued to shift as she traveled through South America absorbing the revolutionary currents in Chile and Argentina.

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[3] Miriam Medrano, interview by author, June 8, 2007.

This chapter looks at each of these stages of her life focusing on personal experiences, local struggles inside the country, and international events that facilitated her transformation into a revolutionary intellectual. Through this process, we can begin to humanize Lil Milagro's radicalization and place her within her historical context. Before moving through the stages of Lil Milagro's life, however, this chapter starts with a brief discussion of how an individual both caters to and is influenced by different audiences. Following this discussion, I offer a succinct overview of the political, economic and social environment of El Salvador in the 1960s, and then examine the progressive evolution of the UES as it transformed from a hegemonic institution into a home for radical discontent. These sections not only provide a way of conceptualizing the evolution of Lil Milagro's intellectual identity but also place her in the historical moment in which she lived.

Defining Lil Milagro's Audience

In my analysis, revolutionary intellectuals can become a theoretical representative of a different class when they take into consideration the responses of their audience. This idea builds from the work of Max Löwy and his examination of Marx and revolution. Yet, it is important to clarify that class does not necessarily define an audience. Instead, an audience is any group of people that an intellectual claims to represent.

Applying this idea to Lil Milagro, we will see that she was a representative of several different groups or audiences during her life, whether it was the Catholic Church, student groups at the UES, or the poor and persecuted in El Salvador. Representing the Catholic Church or student groups, however, does not make Lil Milagro a revolutionary

intellectual, but being a representative of these groups gave Lil Milagro a foundation for embracing her role as a theoretical representative of the poor later in her life. This raises the point that different audiences can also influence and guide an individual's intellectual development, particularly if the individual is still developing a revolutionary worldview. Through this interaction, individuals like Lil Milagro find themselves organically engaged within the intellectual dialectic before they become a theoretical representative of any class. Because of this influence, an audience and an intellectual enter into a dialogue with each other, and I suggest that the openness of this conversation determines the degree to which an audience will follow an intellectual's ideas.

To summarize, an audience is any group that an intellectual claims to represent. Once this audience is linked to a specific class, however, then the intellectual becomes a theoretical representative of that class. Before this occurs, an intellectual can claim groups that are not linked to a class, which gives her/him an opportunity to foster their ability to attract and lead different groups. Tracing which audience Lil Milagro is appealing to during the three stages of her intellectual evolution is, therefore, an important aspect to remember in the following sections.

Welcome to the Urban Jungle

Situated in a liminal moment between reform and revolution, El Salvador entered into an era of prosperity and economic growth in the 1960s. Although this decade began with the blatantly fraudulent election of Lieutenant Colonel Julio Rivera in 1962, his ascendancy to the country's highest office actually opened El Salvador's political arena. Advocating for a proportional representation of political parties in Congress, Rivera pushed through the legislature an amendment to the electoral law that not only allowed

oppositional parties to obtain office in local municipalities, but also gave them a legitimate voice in government legislation by guaranteeing representation in the National Assembly commensurate with each party's electoral strength.[4] Despite the government's effort to create democratic reform, the most radical changes in society were prompted by a regional free trade agreement known as the Central American Common Market (CACM).

Passed in 1960, the CACM was an agreement between El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Costa Rica to facilitate each country's transformation from an agrarian-bureaucratic state into a modernized industrial nation. With a developmentalist ideology underpinning its appeal and inspiration from Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, the CACM espoused a rhetoric that emphasized "regional economic integration, foreign investment, intraregional trade, and industrialization."[5] Although these capitalist principles contributed to a steady rise in El Salvador's GDP throughout the decade, the CACM also brought instability and rapid change to the country, and as Carlos Vilas reminds us, "the industrial sector was built upon an agrarian structure on which it could not—or did not want to—impose significant changes."[6] This reluctance to modernize meant that El Salvador's industrial expansion would rest in the hands of multinational corporations who chose to rely on the importation of raw materials from other countries to manufacture their products. In El Salvador solely to exploit an underpaid and

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[4] Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 74.

[5] John Booth and Thomas Walker *Understanding Central America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 25.

[6] Carlos Vilas, *Between Earthquakes and Volcanoes: Market, State, and the Revolutions in Central America*, translated by Ted Kuster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1995), 59.

desperate workforce, these foreign corporations negated any benefit industrialization would have for the people of El Salvador.[7] The situation deteriorated after thousands of Salvadorans inundated the cities searching for work in this new industrial sector of the economy.

Because the CACM brought technological advancements in manufacturing that required very little labor to function efficiently, unemployment rates rose by nearly 30 percent between 1965 and 1968.[8] As more and more Salvadorans found themselves unemployed, they were forced to live in squalor as the infamous Latin American phenomenon of city slums began to proliferate in the urban centers. With this migration to shantytowns, El Salvador witnessed a dramatic decline in the number of its citizens who had access to drinking water and sewer networks. The situation reached inhumane levels in the 1970s; as Carlos Vilas notes, "the population with drinking water fell from almost 80 percent to 67 percent between 1969 and 1979, and the population with sewer service declined from 74 percent to 47 percent."[9] Without running water, electricity, and sanitation, this new urban population quickly became frustrated.

Two factors acted as a release valve for unemployment. First, thousands of Salvadorans continued their long pattern of migration to Honduras. In their neighbor's

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[7] Under the CACM, international companies moved into El Salvador and created self-sustained enclaves where raw materials were imported, manufactured, and then exported, thus leaving little economic advantage for the country itself. James Dunkerley estimates that in 1970, 85 percent of the materials used in manufacturing were imported. For a more detailed discussion on the economic situation CACM created see Dunkerley, *The Long War: Dictatorship and Revolution in El Salvador* (London: Junction Books, 1982), 45-86.

[8] Dunkerley, *Long War*, 63.

[9] Carlos Vilas, *Earthquakes and Volcanoes*, 59.

backyard, they would find substantial land and work in the quintessential banana republic. In 1969, however, a war between El Salvador and Honduras sent 130,000 Salvadorans back to their *patria*.[10] This migration forced the Salvadoran government and Colonel Fidel Sánchez Hernández to consider the need for agrarian reform, while also escalating land tensions in an already overpopulated country. Both of these factors became important points of contention for the revolutionary vanguard.

The second relief valve came in the form of a new party known as the Partido Demócrata Cristiano (PDC). Portraying itself as the political alternative to the status quo, the Christian Democrats, like their counterparts in Chile and elsewhere, emphasized a middle road between capitalism and communism.[11] Despite the fact that this party supported reform initiatives that often mirrored those of the CACM and Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, its membership maintained a strong unity through a Catholic worldview. This common ground attracted many followers from all sides of the political spectrum, but it also forced the party to split into two factions. While one side embraced the progressive ideas of intellectuals and the social democratic movement, the other half championed political reform through the electoral system. This latter half eventually won the approval of the average Salvadoran as it campaigned against communism, but more important, it found a charismatic leader in José Napoleón Duarte.

Almost immediately, the PDC experienced success and Duarte won the mayoralty of San Salvador in 1964, 1966, and 1968. With control of the capital city, Duarte acted quickly to give his constituents reasons to vote for him in subsequent elections. The

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[10] For a detailed description of the Soccer War, see William H. Durham, *Scarcity and Survival in Central America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1979).

[11] Armstrong and Shenk, *Face of Revolution*, 47.

product of a massive beautification campaign that included streetlights, sanitation, and new schools, San Salvador became a glowing testament to the power of reform. Even Lil Milagro recognized the value of Duarte as a leader when she wrote in a letter, "Pescadito," alluding to the Christian symbol of a fish or *pesca*, "made the night beautiful in San Salvador."[12] She humorously suggested that young couples, who often enjoyed frolicking in the dark city streets, would probably abstain from voting for him in the next elections. Nevertheless, she, like many others, maintained a reserved respect for Duarte's work as he aspired to become "Latin America's second Christian Democratic president, next to Chile's Eduardo Frei."[13]

Despite these promising signs of progress, student organizations, unions, and a new form of Catholicism called liberation theology continued to challenge the foundation that maintained the country's inequitable social order. Through an often-radical rhetoric that emphasized empowerment, social justice, and education, the work of these organizations directly challenged the veil of prosperity that the government celebrated. As confrontations between these groups and the government escalated in the 1960s, the Salvadoran government again returned to its roots and used the military to repress dissident views.[14]

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[12] Lil Milagro Ramirez to Herr Ricardo Cabrera, AHCPC, April 8, 1966.

[13] Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk, *El Salvador the Face of Revolution* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1982.), 53.

[14] After the 1972 election of Molina, the military began a violent campaign of repression; 300 people were found dead or wounded on that day alone. Repression would continue to rise until the civil war began in 1979, see Carlos Vilas, *Earthquakes and Volcanoes*, 82-84.

This time, however, the government's actions collided with a revolutionary counterculture that refused to acquiesce. Largely inspired by the Cuban Revolution in 1959, this movement swept through Latin America influencing not only El Salvador but other countries like Guatemala, Nicaragua, Chile, and Argentina. Gaining momentum in the 1960s and then flourishing in the following decade, this international revolutionary culture had a profound impact on Lil Milagro's intellectual development, particularly in the second and third stages of her young adult life. It would be at the UES, however, that this culture found an avenue for engaging a future revolutionary vanguard, which included Lil Milagro, waiting in the wings.

The University

Established in 1841, fourteen days after El Salvador declared its independence from Spain, the university began as a true Gramscian institution perpetuating the hegemony of the elite. Acting upon its mission to "forge a national identity and to create a national culture," the university was part of a movement to construct a nation through a top-down approach.[15] Graduates from the UES contently became part of a technocratic effort to modernize Salvadoran society in the late nineteenth century, particularly in the areas of public administration. This pattern continued for more than 70 years, evident in the fact that many of El Salvador's presidents also served as rectors of the UES.[16]

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[15] Joseph Maier and Richard W. Weatherhead eds., *The Latin American University* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1979), 7.

[16] For a more thorough explanation of the connections between UES rectors and the President of El Salvador see Grenier, *Emergence of Insurgency in El Salvador: Ideology and Political Will* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 97-109.

By 1928, the UES began its transformation into a revolutionary breeding ground, due in large part to the influence of a university reform movement initiated in Córdoba, Argentina. Similar to the UES, the National University of Córdoba (UNC) began as an institution of the elite. Frustrated with a largely Catholic curriculum, students seized the UNC in April 1918, forcing the government to carry out reform measures to make the university an egalitarian and autonomous institution that would act as a symbol of progress for society.[17] Acting according to these ideals, the students at the UES used the movement in Argentina to demand more autonomy in the late 1920s.[18] Now governing itself, the institution could challenge instead of perpetuate the hegemonic structures of the elite. Its effectiveness in this new role can be seen in the number of revolutionaries that taught or studied at the university. People like Farabundo Martí, Jorge Shafik Handel, Salvador Cayetano Carpio, and Mélida Anaya Montes, all spent time developing their intellectual worldviews at the UES.[19] At the same time, it is important to acknowledge

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[17] For more on this movement and its implications to gender see, Natalia Milanesio, "Gender and Generation: The University Reform Movement in Argentina, 1918," *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 2 (Winter 2005): 505-529.

[18] For an explanation of the Córdoba movement on the UES see Luis Argueta Antillón, "La Reedición de la reforma universitaria de Córdoba, una necesidad histórica*," Estudios Sociales Centroamericanos* 48 (Sept.-Dec. 1988): 17-27.

[19] Farabundo Martí initiated the peasant revolt in 1932. Shafik Handel worked with the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS) in the 1960s and became one of five members of the General Command in the FMLN during the civil war. Salvador Cayetano Carpio was the leader of the PCS in the 1960s and then separated from the organization to start the largest militant group on the left, the Popular Liberation Forces "Farabundo Martí." Mélida Anaya Montes organized and led two strikes for the teacher's union known as ANDES.

that these leaders emerged when El Salvador met the criteria for what Yvon Grenier suggests is a "critical society."[20]

According to Grenier, when societies experience rapid socioeconomic development combined with a political resistance to change they are considered to be in a transitional period. During these moments, social mobilization occurs as different groups, particularly those that are marginalized, search for a way to cope with dramatic social and economic change but find resistance to their demands at the political level. This context then "provides university intellectuals with a public to echo their ideologies."[21] Clearly, the Salvadoran context in the 1960s reflects this process as the CACM altered the economic landscape and students at the UES found a platform for their demands in a burgeoning student population and a discontented labor force.[22] Given these conditions, the rhetoric of student activists appealed to a broader segment of society, particularly those affected by a changing social structure.[23]

In this context, the UES as a whole, became a prominent critic of the regime in power. Recognizing this role, the government implemented a university reform campaign in 1963, the year Lil Milagro began studying at the UES, that attempted to modernize education through a developmentalist lens that regulated administrative

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[20] Yvon Grenier, "The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary Passions in El Salvador: Some Lesson for the Study of Radical Political Movements," *Journal of Human Rights* 3, no 3, (September 2004): 313-329, 323.

[21] Grenier, *Emergence of Insurgency*, 101.

[22] According to Dunkerley, the student population doubled in size, while the budget increased fourfold between 1962 and 1969. See *Long War*, 70.

[23] Grenier, *Emergence of Insurgency*, 100-101.

operations and democratized access in an effort to build a more substantial technocratic workforce. The government believed that the university could change society in a way that would mirror its imperialist neighbor to the North.[24] Instead of co-opting the university's effectiveness, however, the developmentalist policies of the government allowed the university to become a political force in society because thousands of families were able to send their children to the UES for a post-secondary education. This educational access then created an expanding audience for the discontented, evident in the proliferation of leftist literature emerging from the UES in the 1960s.[25] "For all its limitations," Grenier notes, the university became "a potent political resource in a non-democratic environment."[26]

By 1972, president Colonel Arturo Molina recognized that the UES was at the center of an oppositional culture, which rejected the fraudulent election that placed him in the country's highest office. Subsequently, Molina used tanks, artillery, and planes to seize the UES and imprison more than 800 government-identified subversives. With the doors of the UES closed for the next two years, more radicalized students found it easy to participate in the guerrilla organizations proliferating in San Salvador. For the next decade and into the civil war, some of the worst human rights violations in the history of the country targeted former university students. These events suggest that Molina and the

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[24] See Manuel Luis Escamilla, *La reforma educativa salvadoreña* (San Salvador: Ministerio de Educación, 1975).

[25] Beverly and Zimmermann explain that the Central American Universities Publisher (EDUCA) found a new audience in university students to publish a new generation of left-oriented writers and literary critics. See Zimmerman and Beverly, "Salvadoran Revolutionary Poetry," 120.

[26] Yvon Grenier, "The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary Passions," 323.

military actually aided in the disintegration of the social order as radicalized university leaders chose to continue their work in a clandestine environment.

This trajectory is similar to what Lil Milagro experienced during her career at the UES, but as we will see, her story illustrates that radicalization is always a unique and personalized process. A countercultural milieu nourished Lil Milagro's intellectual development, but it also placed her on a violent and eventually deadly path. Whether it was through literature, relationships, or a simple desire for justice, these influences encouraged and even demanded that Lil Milagro become an active political participant in Salvadoran society. The process through which she embraced this imperative, however, was a gradual one. As she changed and adapted to her environment between the years 1963 and 1970, Lil Milagro became a symbol of the passion, perseverance, and tragedy that many of El Salvador's intellectuals encountered once they chose to embrace a revolutionary worldview.

Teacher and Student

"Lil Milagro was a very active woman," her younger cousin Gloria explained to me in 2007. "She had so many interests that it seemed like she worked 24 hours a day; she didn't have time to worry about cleaning the house or doing daily chores."[27] In her active lifestyle, Lil Milagro not only worked toward a degree in law at the UES, but she also followed in her family's footsteps when in April of 1964, she began training to become a teacher at the same school where her mother taught at in 1951, the Escuela

[27] Gloria Ramírez, interview by author, Reseda, CA, August 13, 2007.

Normal de Maestras "España."[28] These two experiences were the cornerstone of Lil Milagro's early young adult life. Through teaching, she fought against the discrepancy between education for the rich and poor, while as a student she discovered that her actions would define her identity as a woman, activist, and intellectual. Both roles facilitated Lil Milagro's intellectual development as she encountered obstacles and opportunities within them that would serve as radicalizing forces in her life.

Like her grandfather, mother, and sister before her, Lil Milagro possessed an avocation for the teaching profession. Her teaching portfolio confirms this as it shows that she received only exceptional marks on her instructor evaluations.[29] Upon finishing her student training in 1966, she began her professional career at the same school she graduated from in 1963, the Instituto Cultural Miguel de Cervantes. There she taught literature to fourth graders and the Constitution to fifth graders. These seminal years as a teacher taught her that a quality education was not offered to the poor. This realization encouraged her to collaborate with teachers from low socioeconomic areas. In 1967 she traveled to Colombia to take part in a teacher's consortium concerning the "Condition of the teaching profession in Latin America, with a focus on socioeconomic status."[30]

While information on Lil Milagro's teaching career is sparse, there are enough resources to analyze her intellectual development as a teacher and how it interacted with her gender and radicalization. Despite a lack of information on the professions in which women typically worked during the 1970s, we know that in 1983 women constituted 70%

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[28] Lil Milagro Ramírez, *Prácticas pedagógicas*, AHCPC, 1963.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Lil Milagro Ramírez to "Recordado amigo," AHCPC, January 4, 1967.

of teachers in El Salvador.[31] This statistic suggests that one of the few ways women could participate in the public economy was through education. Not surprisingly, for Lil Milagro and her family this was also the case.

Lil Milagro's parents taught their children that education can lead to empowerment in an oppressive society; therefore, Lil Milagro's work in this area was probably an early manifestation of her desire to create social change. In fact, this ideal was strong enough to encourage Lil Milagro to work as a teacher while simultaneously studying at the UES, a difficult endeavor in itself. Apparently, even her colleagues in the ERP and RN recognized Lil Milagro's belief in education and its power to change society. After her death, the FMLN established a school named in her honor and quoted her in a lesson plan teachers used at the school. As the quote explained, "the Party should undertake [revolutionary] work in a systematic way: in a school, political ideology is framed and advanced more rapidly."[32] Her words suggest that she believed education could help individuals quickly understand why revolutionary work was necessary in El Salvador. However, if teaching was a manifestation of her desire to create change in this first stage of intellectual development, being a student at the UES was her passion.

Above all, Lil Milagro loved being a student at the university. Inspired by her parents, particularly her mother's ability to obtain a doctorate in philosophy in 1965, she

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[31] Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood Is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1984), 207.

[32] **"**Lil Milagro Ramírez", H2 CE. 99J N68, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen, San Salvador, El Salvador. Spanish: *El desarrollo de un cuadro revolucionario se logra en el que hacer diario…pero el Partido debe acometer la tarea de un modo sistemático: en una escuela, para favorecer el avance mas rápido político ideológico del cuadro.*

directed almost all of her energy in her first years to becoming a scholar at the UES. During this stage of her life, she hoped that by being studious she could obtain a doctoral degree in France, a place she dreamt about traveling to at an early age.[33] This dedication to her studies, however, often prevented her from indulging in school politics, traveling around the world, or even forming romantic relationships.

In a letter to a family friend in Mexico, we see the extent of her commitment to school, as she explains why she would not be joining her sister and mother in Mexico that year. She writes, "I don't think I should leave the country while I am studying at the University especially because I want to get my bachelor's degree here and then my doctorate in France."[34] Perhaps to compensate for missing these opportunities to travel, she continued her relationships with the many pen pals she had collected over the years. In fact, most of her letters from 1964 to 1965 were written to people living outside of El Salvador. Although these letters could be seen as a simple hobby for collecting stamps, exchanging ideas, or discovering the cultural nuances of other countries, these relationships gave Lil Milagro a cosmopolitan understanding of different cultures, an attribute that proved important in her travels to South America later in her life.

Lil Milagro's passion for her studies hindered her political activism. This is not to say that she was unaware of the political tensions evolving across Latin America. In fact, in a letter to Medrano in 1964 she explains that the Asociación General de Estudiantes Universitarios Salvadoreños (AGEUS), the preeminent organization for

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[33] See Appendix B for Lil Milagro's poem on traveling to Paris.

[34] Lil Milagro Ramírez letter to Srta. María Auxiliadora Lake. Mexico D.F. Mexico, San Salvador Abril de 1965. Spanish: *Yo no pienso salir del país mientras estudie en la U. porque espero licenciarme aquí y doctorarme en Francia.*

students at the UES, held a general assembly to discuss and ultimately support a student strike against the Honduran dictator Oswaldo López Arellano.[35] At this point in her career, however, Lil Milagro chose to remain on the sidelines of student activism. In another letter to Medrano, a particularly enlightening passage explains not only the justification behind her decision to remain "indifferent," but also reveals her ambivalence toward the way in which her colleagues operated within the political arena. She writes:

> About my political activity, Miriam, I am afraid you will be a little disappointed. Something is stopping me from participating in any active way. I do not know if it is my desire to constantly study, or the amount of time my poetic and literary ambitions absorb. Maybe it is because I am disappointed about the diverse and displeasing attitudes that exist in the political field. I am not referring to any particular group or person, but as a whole, they can be somewhat disastrous, and their results are somewhat unsatisfactory to me. I guess I still haven't embraced the famous phrase, "The ends justify the means." Nevertheless, I am still in the indifferent camp, and I understand that I am beginning to deserve that name. Tomorrow they can throw in my face my lack of active participation; in the end, we will see what I decide to do tomorrow.[36]

This seminal passage provides many clues to understanding Lil Milagro at this moment in her life. Clearly, she felt a need, or perhaps even a moral obligation, to join the political struggle that was unfolding at the university. Given the fact that she grew up in a household that emphasized political activism (i.e. her father's work with the PAR

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[35] Letter to Miriam, AHCPC, October 1964.

[36] Lil Milagro to 'oriental' (Miriam Medrano), AHCPC, October 28, 1965. Spanish: *Sobre me actividad política, Miriam, temo decepcionarte en parte, no participo de ella en forma activa, hay algo que me detiene. No sé si es que mi afán de estudiar más cada vez, o mis ambiciones poéticas y literarias que me absorben profunda cantidad de tiempo o tal vez mi desilusión por diversas actitudes nada gratas en el campo político de personas y agrupaciones, no me refiero a ninguna en particular, pero a conjunto es a veces desastroso, y sus resultados un tanto insatisfactorios para mí, que aún no asimilo la frase tan famosa de "El fin justifica los medios", de modo que aún voy caminando con el franco paso de los indiferentes, porque comprendo que me estoy haciendo acreedora a ese nombre y que mañana pueden echarme en cara mi no participación de modo activo, en fin, veremos que decido hacer más adelante.*

and her mother's work in various women's organizations), she understood the importance of working through the political system. Yet, that she questioned the way in which student activists achieved their goals suggests that either she feared the repercussions of taking an active role in politics or she had yet to fully embrace the radical actions of those who participated in these organizations. The answer, I suggest, lies somewhere between these two interpretations.

The military occupied the university in 1960 and in the process brutalized several students and professors because they took a "leading role in the uprising against José María Lemus."[37] These actions, three years before Lil Milagro joined the UES, showed that this institution was not immune to political repression. For this reason, this event must have weighed heavily on those who were yet to become student activists because it warned that political participation could lead to physical harm. Adding to this collective memory, a more radical culture existed at the UES than perhaps Lil Milagro was accustomed to as a child. Although she grew up in a progressive and politically active family, she was wary of embracing aggressive public protests and violent action advocated by student activists like Joaquín Vilalobos, Fermán Cienfuegos, Francisco Jovel, Jorge Shafik Handel, and Salvador Sánchez Cerén..[38]

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[37] Grenier, *Emergence of Insurgency*, 112.

[38] Each of these individuals was part of the five member General Command of the FMLN during the civil war. Prior to the civil war, each participated in the formation of a leftist organization in the 1970s. Joaquín Villalobos was one of the initial founders of the ERP. His most infamous act was the murder of Roque Dalton. Fermán Cienfuegos was a member of the ERP but he defected after the murder of Roque Dalton and helped establish the FARN. Francisco Jovel was the leader of the PRTC. Salvador Sánchez Cerén was one of the founding members of ANDES and in 1970 he participated in the creation of the FPL. He later became the leader of the FPL after the bizarre murder of Mélida Anaya Montes and the suicide of Salvador Cayetano Carpio in 1983.

More than anything, Lil Milagro's desire to remain politically "indifferent" was a product of her emphasis on education, but she was also reluctant to follow the tactics used by the AGEUS. One way to interpret this decision is to see it through the intellectual dialectic discussed in chapter one. According to this process, Lil Milagro needed to take into account the opinions of her audience, in this case the AGEUS, and act upon these ideas only after subjecting her work to self-criticism. Her statement that she had yet to embrace the famous phrase "the ends justify the means," suggests Lil Milagro concluded that her understanding of right and wrong justified her decision to remain inactive in the political sphere. At the same time, the dialectic also suggests that she should direct her work "in accordance with the responses of [her] audience." However in this case, it would seem that her audience was demanding that she take an active role in the political sphere. From this perspective, Lil Milagro's stance was not consistent with this intellectual dialectic, because she chose to ignore the demands of her audience. Although there is a give and take between the audience and its theoretical representative in this dialectic, Lil Milagro did not claim to represent anyone's ideals except her own. As a result, she did not completely adhere to the characteristics of a revolutionary intellectual at this particular juncture.

On a side note, Lil Milagro's belief that radical demands were not the only way to create change may be a testament to her ability to think critically and independently about the world. Although in time she would join her colleagues in armed struggle, it was only after she determined that other means of resistance such as protests and elections could not change society. From this perspective, Lil Milagro was unique in that she was not

prone to what Dunkerley suggests is the "natural deviation of youth."[39] As he explains, "radicalism can be the product of youthful tendencies towards adventurism, gangsterism, and an aversion to patient organizational work in mass movements."[40] For Lil Milagro, however, her letters typically illustrate critical and informed thinking, despite her age. Yet, at this point in her life, Lil Milagro invested her time in interests that remained unthreatening. Ironically, these interests, particularly in literature, guided her towards the individuals that would influence her actions in later years.

Towards the end of 1965, Lil Milagro established relationships with several students who shared her passion for literature. Assiduous readers, Lil Milagro and her her sister Luz América wanted to share their passion for literature with others, and thus started a literary group named "Alba 13." Idealistic and full of hope, these students set out to create a magazine they named *Péndulo del tiempo*, or Pendulum of Time. For them, *Péndulo* would present "bright, new words from voices that are born into the struggle, armed with hope."[41] Their first and only publication included an introduction by Lil Milagro's old childhood friend Ramón Hernán de Fuentes, poems by Marietta Suárez and José David Escobar Galindo, and a literary essay by Rubén Ignacio Zamora

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[39] Despite Dunkerley's suggestion, he notes that Latin American universities have always been more radical than their European counterparts, thus suggesting that university students in Latin America have an inherent radical nature, *The Long War*, 70. Still, such a suggestion denies the fact that these countries typically had few political avenues for resistance. This fact alone, can contribute to the radicalization of individuals at the University.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Alba 13, *Péndulo del tiempo* (San Salvador, El Salvador: Editorial Universitaria "José B. Cisneros," October 1965, AHCPC) Spanish: *se presenta con palabras frescas de voces que nacen a la lucha, armadas de esperanza.*

dissecting Aldus Huxley's *Time Must Have A Stop*. Largely poetic in nature, each piece expressed an individual perspective on an idealistic hope for a better world.

Although Alba 13 published only one magazine, the group met regularly to discuss literature, art, and politics. During these meetings, Lil Milagro's path towards radicalization began to materialize, particularly when she befriended people like Marianella Villa García and Rubén Ignacio Zamora. Although both of these individuals became close friends, her relationship with each of them was quite different. With Marianella, Lil Milagro found a companion who shared her passion for literature, foreign languages, travel, and music. Moreover, she desired, like Lil Milagro, to become a human rights lawyer. These aspirations led Lil Milagro to write, "we are friends in French class as well as in our ambitions."[42]

On the other hand, Rubén shared many of the same interests as Lil Milagro, but also took a public role as the secretary of the AGEUS, where he represented the organization Movimiento Estudiantil Social Cristiano (MESC). For Lil Milagro this was significant because the MESC was organized by Christian Democrat students who worked through the Catholic Church and advocated many of the ideals posited by the PDC and the social gospel. Lil Milagro admired Rubén and his work, but the relationship went further when she developed a small crush on the soon-to-be revolutionary and political leader.[43] As she explains,

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[42] Lil Milagro to "oriental" (Miriam Medrano), October 28, 1965, AHCPC. Spanish: *como tu y como yo, tiene ambiciones grandes y somos compañeras en el idioma Francés y en las ambiciones, también leemos y comentamos de literatura.*

[43] Zamora would later become the leader of the MPSC after it broke apart from the PDC when Duarte….He was also the presidential candidate for the FMLN in the 1995

> I think that right now [Rubén] is the only boy I would seriously consider forming a relationship with…. but he is very busy, and in addition, he is under the impression that Lil "does not want to have a boyfriend because she thinks more about studying than this thing called love."[44]

Love interest aside, these comments are consistent with this phase of Lil Milagro's life, as her dedication to her studies again prevented her from pursuing endeavors outside of the scholarly arena. Moreover, a feminist current runs through her words as she emphasizes the rarity of finding a young man like Rubén, who valued a more egalitarian relationship in a society characterized by male chauvinism. Although Lil Milagro and Zamora eventually moved beyond this puppy love, they developed a strong platonic relationship, one she compared to the bond between an older brother and a younger sister.[45] This bond allowed Lil Milagro to view Zamora as a trusted companion and advisor throughout her career at the UES.

The relationships Lil Milagro established in Alba 13 were some of the most important of her young adult life. As she became more active in politics from 1966 to 1968, interactions with friends served as a soundboard for her thoughts as she adapted her worldview to the environment that surrounded her. For this reason, "the university was always a sacred placed for her," explained her cousin Gloria, "because it was where ideas

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elections. As Grenier describes him, he "was (and is) one of the most able and articulate politicians in the country." Grenier, 135.

[44] Lil Milagro to 'oriental', No Date, AHCPC. Spanish: Creo que sería el único muchacho, por ahora, con quien sería capaz de formar un noviazgo, me gusta cantidad, tanto que temo de vez en cuando descubrirme, pero él esta bastante asediado, además, sabe que Lil "no quiere tener novio porque piensa más en estudiar que en esa cosa llaman amor.

[45] Lil Milagro to María Auxiliadora Lake, Mexico D.F., April 1965. AHCPC.

of liberation flourished."[46] Explaining the process in which liberation became a part of Lil Milagro's identity, to determine whether it emerged organically through her experience or whether she acquired it from her colleagues, is the focus of the next section.

A Year of Intellectual Experiences

At the end of 1966, Lil Milagro wrote a letter to her friend Marianella who was studying abroad at the time. In it, she expresses what seems to be a 180-degree shift from what she believed only a year earlier. She writes, "from my perspective I cannot support passive people; for me, the meaning of life is found in action and work."[47] While such a statement seems contrary to her decision a year earlier to "sit on the sidelines," it reflects that 1966 was a crucial year in Lil Milagro's intellectual development. Although the year began like any other, a reading of her letters illustrates that her relationships with her colleagues at the UES were coming to have more influence on her identity and perceptions.

Lil Milagro remained extremely busy in 1966 as she continued her work as a teacher and a student at the UES. Adding to her workload that year, she also found a job as a secretary for an interregional shipping manufacturer. While she received a pittance for her work, it was enough money to help with finances at home. As she explained in writing to a friend in Germany, "I am very happy with my occupation because, above all,

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[46] Gloria Ramírez, interview, August 13, 2006.

[47] Lil Milagro to "Recordada Marianella" November 29, 1966, AHCPC. Spanish: *Claro que tuve oportunidad de conocer tu carácter y quedé encantada de tu actividad, por mi parte no puedo soportar a los entes pasivos, para mí el justo significado de la vida es la acción, y el trabajo.*

it allows me to help out at home; as you know there is always something or another that we lack at the home, and to be able to help is a good thing."[48] This comment reiterates the point that despite her middle class background, her family was not affluent. Indeed, their middle class lifestyle in El Salvador would seem poor to anyone from the North. Nonetheless, her contributions helped her family live a comfortable life in El Salvador, and in that Lil Milagro found great pride. These comments also illustrate that her family remained an integral part of her life during her time at the UES, despite deepening bonds with friends.

Perhaps the most rewarding event in 1966 came when an idol from her past recognized her poetry. Claudia Lars, the first female national poet of El Salvador—or as Lil Milagro described her, "the best poet in El Salvador"—selected two of Lil Milagro's poems to be published in a magazine called *Cultura*.[49] Published among the work of well-known Latin American and Salvadoran authors, her poems "Destrozado jilguero" and "Elegía prematura" addressed themes of nature, death, and the loss of innocence. She also held the distinction of being the youngest Salvadoran poet in the magazine and, as a biographical note recognized, she was a poet who "demonstrated a love for literature from an early age."[50] Adding to this distinction, she was one of only three women to be

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[48] Lil Milagro to Herr. Ricardo Cabrera Alemania July, 14, 1966, AHCPC. Spanish: *Estoy muy contenta con mi ocupación y sobretodo por que me permite ayudar en casa, tu sabes que siempre en el hogar hace falta una que otra cosa y cualquier ayuda es buena.*

[49] Claudia Lars, *Cultura: Revista del Ministerio de Educacion*, April-June, (San Salvador, El Salvador: Dirección General de Publicaciones del Ministerio de Educación, 1966)

[50] Ibid., 7. Spanish: *La más joven poetisa salvadoreña en la actualidad. Desde muy niña mostró su amor por la literatura*."

published in the magazine with the other 21 writers being male. Identifying her as both the youngest writer and one of the few women in the magazine illustrates the lack of intellectual and artistic equality in a patriarchal society. In the end, Lil Milagro received 50 *colones* for the publication of her writings, but again she found more satisfaction in creating, as she states, "something that someone might value."[51]

Finally, 1966 presented Lil Milagro with her first opportunity to travel to South America. Joining her mother at a teacher's conference in Colombia, Lil Milagro met with educators from all parts of Latin America as they discussed the ramifications of socioeconomic status in education. She found the conference "interesting and helpful," but she especially enjoyed collaborating with her colleagues from other countries, demonstrating her passion for intellectual discussion.[52] Upon conclusion of the conference, Lil Milagro and her mother decided to travel through Peru, Colombia, and Venezuela.

Of all the places she visited, none impressed her like Machu Picchu. Like the thousands who visited this sacred site before her, the magical city of the Incans touched her heart. She explained its impact when she wrote, "it was emotionally imposing with a touch of mystery, and in those sacred places I was repeatedly reminded of the poems by Santos Chocano."[53] She continues by quoting Chocano's poem "La tristeza inca,"

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[51] Lil Milagro to Srta. Ma. Auxiliadora Lake M. July 14, 1966, AHCPC. Spanish: *cada participación la pagan en 50.00 pero más que la plata, me llena de satisfacción el hecho de que en algo valga lo que hago.*

[52] Lil Milagro to Recordado Amigo, January 4, 1967, AHCPC.

[53] Ibid., Spanish: *es algo emocionante imponente y con sabor a misterio, en aquellos parajes sagrados, recordé muchas veces los poemas de Santos Chocano*: *"…este era un inca triste de soñadora frente, de ojos siempre dormidos y sonrisa de hiel…"*

emphasizing his dream-like description of this world. In sync with Chocano's words, Lil Milagro took many "dreamlike" pictures of the ruins. One rather portentous scene shows Lil Milagro's figure silhouetted next to a sacrificial Incan altar. Her brother explained that this was one of his sister's favorite pictures, perhaps because it alluded to the sacrifice of martyrdom. Without Lil Milagro's personal explanation, it is difficult to say that she took it as a poetic representation. Nevertheless, her brother explained that his mother strongly disliked this picture of her daughter because it portrayed her in an ominous light, and once she entered the life of a clandestine operative her mother refused to acknowledge the picture even existed.[54]

An Intellectual in a Radical Environment

It is important to note that amidst these events, the environment at the UES in 1966 continued to reflect its radical leftist spirit. Regrettably, most of the university documents from this time (i.e. newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, etc.) were destroyed in 1973 after Molina seized the UES. Fortunately, we can find a glimpse of this radical culture in a letter by Lil Milagro, describing a student protest parade. In her letter, she paints a vivid picture of the different floats that passed by on the street. Many of them, if not all, commented on the most contentious events occurring around the world. As in many other universities at this time, the Vietnam War stood at the center of student criticism. In this parade, Vietnam was the main centerpiece in a float that protrayed Uncle Sam and a Vietnamese guerrilla as wrestler in a ring "*de lucha libre*." In this

[54] José Ramírez, interview, June 6, 2006.

scenario, however, the "chinito" came out victorious as he pummeled Uncle Sam into submission, effectively giving him a black eye.[55]

This particular float is emblematic of the radical spirit in universities across the world in the 1960s. In fact, the Mexican scholar Jorge Castañeda has written a 500-page monograph about the connections between Latin America and a universal leftist movement sweeping through the world during this time.[56] Of course, this Salvadoran parade also celebrated the victories of the left in Latin America by touting the virtues of the Cuban and Guatemalan revolutions. Although Lil Milagro does not explain these floats in detail, her comments give the impression that commemorating these victories was an important part of demonstration by students at the UES.[57]

From a more local perspective, the students also attacked many conservative figures and symbols of the time, beginning with their president Julio Rivera. Students made fun of this avid sports fan whose only virtue was staging football exhibitions, dubbing his float El Presidente Deportista. Moreover, their allegoric representations ridiculed Rivera's developmentalist goals and policies. Finally, students attacked their new rival in higher learning, the University of Central America "José Simeón Cañas" (UCA). Established in 1965 by conservative Jesuits offering an "alternative to the increasingly radical national university," the UCA was presented as the antithesis of the

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[55] Lil Milagro to Herr Ricardo Cabrera, Germany, July, 14, 1966, AHCPC.

[56] Jorge Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left after the Cold War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 1993), 177.

[57] Lil Milagro to Herr Ricardo Cabrera Alemania, July, 14, 1966, AHCPC.

UES.[58] The parade included a massive float that satirized the UCA. Lil Milagro's description of this float is interesting:

> [This float was] full of men dressed as acolytes, a priest as the professor, and a church bell. When the priest said that they were about to start classes, all of the "students" broke into hymns and songs of praise. It was most ingenious and everyone enjoyed it, except for some sisters who nearly fainted and a priest who resented some of the jokes.[59]

Although it is possible to read too much into these comments, they illustrate that, in this instance, she identifies more with students than the clergy. This does not mean that she was moving away from all of her religious conviction, but it does suggest that she could be skeptical of religious fervor.

One way to conceptualize this stage is to place her comments within the intellectual dialectic. During this stage of Lil Milagro's life her friends and colleagues at the UES were at least one contingent of the "audience" whose opinions and ideas she valued. Through her writings, we can see how she caters to this audience.

Beginning with Rubén, Lil Milagro expressed in 1966 a deep admiration for his passion stating, "you exhibit a great spirit. We are so accustomed to pettiness in this world that when we find demonstrations of such rich and deep spirit we realize that the human soul is always a mystery in which God is concealed."[60] This comment shows the

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[58] Grenier, *Emergence of Insurgency*, 144.

[59] Lil Milagro to Ricardo Cabrera July 14, 1966. Spanish: *sobre un camión imitaron un aula de clase, llena de muchachos vestidos como acólitos, y un padre de profesor, una campana y cuando el sacerdote decía que iban a recibir clases, todos los "alumnos" rompían a cantar alabados y cánticos religiosos, fue de lo más ingenioso y gusto mucho al público, excepto algunes señoras Beatas que casi se desmayan del susto y uno que otro Sacerdote que se resintió de la broma.*

[60] Lil Milagro to Reuben Zamora, October 4, 1966. Spanish: *demuestra grandeza de espíritu, Tan acostombrados como estamos a la mezquindad en este mundo, cuando*

value Lil Milagro placed on personal virtue, and it illustrates how she encouraged its development in her friends. Moreover, the Christian undertones in this passage evoke a common spiritual bond in the two. In the same letter, she asks Rubén's guidance on whether or not she should become a member of a Christian social movement known as La Jornada de la Vida Cristiana, or Christian Life Journey.[61] She explains that although a priest could help her decide whether or not to participate in a three-day journey of spiritual renewal with this organization, she felt more comfortable asking for Rubén's advice because they had formed a strong bond over the past three years.[62] Lil Milagro is deferring to her friends for advice rather than the clergy. Although her younger sister, Amada, was one of the first promoters of this organization and it is possible that she sought her advice as well, it is significant that she solicited the opinion of her colleague.

If Rubén was Lil Milagro's spiritual companion, Marianella was her political advisor. She explains this relationship in a letter to her friend stating:

> Your social ideas and mine are alike. I celebrate your excitement because it is an indicator of you not wanting to just have fun, but rather having an interest in problems of humanity. The same thing happened to me at the University. I think

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encontramos estas demostraciones de amplitud y riqueza de espíritu, nos damos cuenta que el alma humano es siempre un misterio en el cual se oculta Dios."[60]

[61] Organized as an evangelizing Catholic youth movement, La Jornada invites youth like Lil Milagro to partake in a Three-day conference of spiritual renewal. Upon completion, Jornadistas seek to help young people deal with the trials and tribulations of life. As Lil Milagro's sister explained it, "La Jornada was a movement of youth from the PDC, but it was led by the church and progressive priests who organized meetings where we studied the bible and Jesus in a progressive manner, applying these lessons to the conditions in society." These meetings emphasized that "everyone was equal and there was no difference between sexes and socioeconomic status." [61]

[62] Lil Milagro to Rubén Zamora, October 4, 1966, AHCPC. Spanish: *Sé que tal vez el Padre Ramón pueda aconsejarme al respecto, pero tú, creo que me conoces por lo menos tres años de compañarismo y convivencia así me lo indican, dime: que crees que debo hacer?*

> the same thing happens to anyone who has a little bit of human and social conscience. You know that at home, we have always been a little revolutionary. Daddy is a tremendous activist, always in the opposition and because of this he has suffered persecution from the government, and has even been sent out of the country because he was considered a threat. Instead of intimidating us, his experiences have encouraged us to fight for what we believe. Mommy, even though she does not seem to be this way, also has progressive ideas. When she was at the university, she followed the social tendencies that seek equality and justice, and now, she is about to graduate with her doctorate in Philosophy and Letters.[63]

This passage is a perfect illustration of the multiplicity of political influences in Lil Milagro's life. She explains how her family serves as the motivating factor behind her strength and idealistic worldview. It might even be said that she sought out friendships with people like her parents who possessed a similar "consciousness" of the world and were willing to act according to their ideals. This is perhaps one of the most important themes in her life in later years because it connects her love for her family with her clandestine activity. At this time, however, her comments suggest that Lil Milagro was ready to act upon her ideals and distance herself from the "indifferent ones." This decision became abundantly clear in 1967.

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[63] Lil Milagro to "Recordada Marianella," November 29, 1966, AHCPC. Spanish: *Tus ideas sociales también concuerdan con las mías, celebro tu fogosidad, eso indica que no solo eres nueva ola para divertirte sino que también te llenan de interés los problemas humanos, Lo propio me sucedió a mí cuando ingresé a la Universidad, y creo la pasa a todo aquel que tiene un poco de conciencia humana y social ?No? Sabes que en casa siempre hemos sido un tanto revolucionarios, Papy es un político tremendo, siempre de la oposición y ha sufrido muchas persecuciones del gobierno y hasta lo han emigrado de vez en cuando fuera del país por peligroso, con lo cual en vez de ponernos tímidas más nos ha entrado el deseo de luchar. Mamy, aunque no lo parezca, tiene ideas de avanzada, ella también cuando estuvo en la Universidad, siguió la línea de los conquistas sociales por la igualada y la justicia, ahora está por licenciarse en Filosofía y Letras.*

Death and Religion

Although 1966 saw Lil Milagro engage her passion for change and her desire for action, the year itself ended on a sad note. Suffering from a long battle with lung cancer, her grandmother, on her mother's side, died just before Christmas on December 4, 1966. Fortunately, her *abuela* died in the company of her family and embracing her youngest daughter. "By the grace of God," Lil Milagro wrote, "she passed away quietly without any major pain, because she has already suffered too many little episodes of agony."[64] Although her grandmother's death was devastating, Lil Milagro was especially saddened by her grandfather's loss of his wife after 53 years of marriage. Concerned about his ability to continue living in the small pueblo of San Juan Nonualco, she was able to find comfort in the fact that as a former teacher the people of his town respected him and would care for him if needed.

Although it is difficult to measure the degree to which the death of her grandmother affected Lil Milagro's outlook on life, the following month she made the decision to participate in La Jornada, or the journey. She describes this event with extraordinary passion and reverence while writing to a friend,

> This year, I have had a wonderful experience…I was invited to be a part of a "Christian Life Journey," It is three days when you meet with a group of girls (or boys) to reflect a little about Christianity, but really, to reflect on each person's particular life. If we received baptism and the sacraments of the Church, why wouldn't we live the Christian life, a sincere life of true charity, without hypocrisy.[65]

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[64] Lil Milagro to Pety Querida, December 13, 1966, AHCPC. Spanish: *Gracias a Dios, tuvo un tránsito leve un desprendimiento sin mayores sufrimientos, porque ya antes había sufrido tantas pequeñas agonías."*

[65] Lil Milagro to Ana, April, 26, 1967, AHCPC. Spanish *Este año, he tenido una experiencia muy bella, ...fui invitada a asistir a una "Jornada de Vida Cristiana"...Son tres días en que te reúnen a un grupo de muchachas (o de muchachos) para hacerlas*

We see that living a life of compassion and sincerity was an important ideal for Lil Milagro, and one that guided her decisions. Moreover, Lil Milagro was attracted to the message of women's empowerment within this movement. As she stated, "I am enamored by this new spirit of the woman as a saint, Christian and apostle…it is like a new dress Superman style that can never be destroyed or discolored."[66] This experience gave Lil Milagro strength and courage to act upon her ideals, and La Jornada would become the vehicle through which she chose to participate in the political arena at the UES.

For the next two years, she dedicated numerous hours to a mission of preaching the gospel of social justice to youth in El Salvador, with students at the university serving as beneficiaries of her work. She even joined MESC as a way of using this organization to spread the message of La Jornada. As she wrote to a friend from La Jornada, "do you remember our conversation about our work in the university and the obligation we have to work in our environment? This year, the MESC came to me and proposed that I accept a nomination to be treasurer of the department."[67] As a member of this organization, Lil

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reflexionar un poco sobre el cristianismo, pero sobre todo, sobre la vida particular de cada una, si hemos recibido el bautismo y los sacrementos de la Iglesia, Por qúe no vivir cristianamente, pero una vida de verdadera caridad, sin hipocresías, sincera.

[66] Lil Milagro to María Esther, Nicaragua, March 30, 1967, AHCPC. Spanish: *me siento encantada de este nuevo espíritu de mujer santa, cristiana y apostólica tan alegre que me he podido hacer, es como un nuevo vestido estilo Superman, que nunca se rompe ni se desluce.*

[67] Lil Milagro to Recordada María Esther, June 3, 1967, AHCPC. Spanish: *Recuerdas lo que conversábamos en nuestra Jornada sobre nuestra actividad en la U. sobre nuestra obligación de trabajar en nuestro ambiente? Este año, el MESC (Movimiento Estudiantil Social Cristiano) vino a proponerme si aceptaba la candidatura a tesorera de la Facultad,*

Milagro entered into the public political arena on the UES campus. There she joined Zamora and many others in a quest to create a Christian socialist world.

Although the Christian underpinnings of the MESC suggest that the organization was more reformist than revolutionary, in many ways it was the student equivalent of liberation theology. In fact, Lil Milagro's sister and cousin agreed that La Jornada was an early manifestation of liberation theology and the progressive ideas it espoused.[68] However, because liberation theology did not enter into the collective consciousness of Salvadorans until the archbishop of San Salvador, Luis Chávez y Gonzaléz, began advocating ideas of the movement in 1968, Lil Milagro's work with La Jornada is too early to be considered part of this growing gospel.[69] Nevertheless, both liberation theology and La Jornada share many ideas, and for this reason, it is useful to touch on some of key understandings of liberation theology in Latin America.

Liberation Theology and La Jornada

For many, the origins of liberation theology can be traced back to colonial times. Specifically, in 1512, the Dominican priest Bartolomé de Las Casas criticized Spanish conquistadors for unnecessarily killing thousands of indigenous people in Mexico. According to the theologian Phillip Berryman, Las Casas argued "Indians were better off as living pagans than as dead Christians, and insisted that they must be won over by the

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[68] Liberation theology did not achieve widespread support in El Salvador until 1970. That year, the Archbishop held a conference called the National Week for Joint Pastoral Practice, and invited priests from rural origins in order to promote the developments from Medellín. This action encouraged rural organization and education according to the tenets of the social gospel. See John Hammond, *Fighting to Learn: Popular Education and Guerrilla War in El Salvador* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

[69] Hammond, *Fighting to Learn,* 29.

power of the gospel rather than the force of arms."[70] Drawing upon examples like Las Casas, progressive priests from all parts of Latin America met in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968 to discuss the implications of the Second Vatican Council in 1961, also known as Vatican II. According to the Brazilian theologians Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, the Vatican Council "produced a theological atmosphere characterized by great freedom and creativity."[71] In this open environment, priests criticized the many injustices occurring in the world and "affirmed the more humble 'pilgrim' status of the Church, journeying alongside the rest of humankind."[72] Phillip Berryman puts this event in its historical perspective when he explains, "for centuries church authorities had been piling sandbags higher and higher to withstand the rising water of modernity. With Vatican II the dam broke."[73]

After Vatican II, the Medellín Conference became the "Magna Carta" of the movement. The documents that emerged from this conference essentially denounced institutionalized violence, demanded profound societal change that would move underdeveloped countries away from dependence, and called for the conscientization of the poor based on the work of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire.[74] For Berryman and

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[70] Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 10.

[71] Leonardo Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll: Burns & Oates/Search Press Ltd, 1987), 69.

[72] Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1991), 17.

[73] Berryman, *Liberation Theology,* 16.

[74] Paulo Freire developed a series of literary techniques that allowed the poor to learn to read, while at the same time making them aware of the social injustices of their

many other theologians, the Medellín documents outlined an implementation strategy for the movement with an emphasis on a "preferential treatment for the poor."

Using these theoretical ideas, progressive priests then journeyed into rural areas and began the process of building Christian Base Communities. In these communities, the clergy focused on training peasants in three areas: Christian theology, national reality, and organizing techniques.[75] The training then encouraged the delegates to become promoters of the movement and to teach others the tenets of the social gospel. The theologian Christian Smith makes an important distinction here concerning the movement of liberation theology. He argues that as a theology, "it is simply a coherent set of religious ideas, about and for liberation," but as a movement it is an "attempt to mobilize a previously unmobilized constituency for collective action against an antagonist to promote social change."[76] Given this insight, Christian Base Communities can be seen as the manifestation of the social movement, while Vatican II and the Medellín Conference elaborated its theological aspects.

Applying these ideas to La Jornada, we see that both movements spread the ideas of the social gospel to others, both encouraged lay people to read the bible and act upon its lessons, and both wanted to create change in society. In this organization, Lil Milagro embraced these ideas through her part in a group of Jornadistas who created the "Secretariado Especial." This group placed the basic doctrines of the religion and

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situations. See Paulo Freire, *Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Liberation*, trans. by Tony Coates (New York: Continuum, 1989).

[75] For a thorough discussion on the work inside Christian Base Communities see, John L. Hammond, *Fighting to Learn*.

[76] Smith, *Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 25.

Christian thinking into a set of rules and regulations that the organization followed.[77] In the end, Lil Milagro believed that this work would facilitate relationships with other youth movements to form a "union of wonderful Christians" who would then help spread the social gospel throughout her country.[78]

Not surprisingly, her work with this movement influenced her political ideology. She explains this in a letter to Marianella when she writes:

> I will say that the socialist ideology is the most fitting for our Latin American countries; the Christian modality is attractive to me because I belong to that religion, but only if there is a truly social-Christian revolution with virtuous aims that does not seek to benefit the oligarchy, even if it is Catholic. I see myself as an advocate of social critique.[79]

Recognizing the long history of complicity between the oligarchy and the Catholic Church, Lil Milagro still expresses a desire to participate in a Christian revolution espousing the ideas of the social gospel. She continues, however, writing that regardless of her Catholic identity, she is above all a Latin American. Perhaps alluding to the ideals of the Cuban intellectual José Martí in *Nuestra América*, Lil Milagro explains her worldview in a similar way, stating:

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[77] Lil Milagro to Dear Rabbit August 22, 1968, AHCPC. Spanish: *El Conejo y yo formamos parte del Secretariado Especial (vocalía) de formación Doctrinal, o sea poner las bases doctrinales de la religión y el pensamiento cristiano (encíclicas, documentos conciliares, pastorales, pensamiento de la iglesia, etc.) Y trabaja con nosotros el Padre Aguilar, y además dos muchachos (hembra y varón) de las nuevas jornadas,*

[78] Lil Milagro to Dear Rabbit August 22, 1968, AHCPC.

[79] Lil Milagro to Marianella, March 23, 1967, AHCPC. Spanish: *Si me preguntas a mí cuál es la mía te diré que la ideología socialista es la que me parece mías adecuada a nuestros países de Latinoamérica, la modalidad cristiana me atrae por cuanto que pertenezco a esa religión, pero siempre y cuando la revolución social cristiana sea verdadera, con fines completamente limpios y no propugne por oligarquías aunque éstas sean de católicos, creo que me sitúo entre las personas de pensamiento social.*

> I clearly proclaim myself against any kind of imperialism, neither yellowish like the Yankee imperialists, nor red like the Soviet Union. I am one of those whose body and soul belong to the Third World, the American world, free of external influences, with its own idiosyncrasy and ways of forging its own freedom.[80]

The theme that binds these statements together is that Lil Milagro desired change for her country and her "America." Whether or not a social order underpinned by Christian principles was possible, she remained committed to the pursuit of equality and freedom in her country.

Unfortunately, the work of La Jornada never fulfilled the aspirations that guided Lil Milagro's actions. She became particularly aware of its shortcomings during her efforts to help organize the three-day spiritual journeys that were at the center of the movement. During this time, she revealed a deep concern about her ability to make La Jornada a popular organization. Without a dedicated "spiritual director," it was proving to be difficult. She expressed these concerns in a letter to her sister Luz América:

> Sometimes I lie awake into the late hours of the night. Maybe it should not worry me like this, but I feel guilty about something that is going to happen and it is necessary to find a solution beforehand. On the other hand, I understand that if the Jornadas do not come to fruition, everything will end and die. You know that we have spent a year and a half trying to make it work. But I tell you that we are going to continue; we do not lack enthusiasm, although our group is completely new, a little inexperienced, and even a little disorganized in certain aspects.[81]

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[80] Lil Milagro to Marianela, March 23, 1967, AHCPC. Spanish*: De plano me pronuncio contra los imperialismos, de cualquier clase que sean, ni amarillistas como el yanki ni rojos como el soviético. Soy de las que pertenecen en cuerpo y alma al Tercer Mundo, al mundo Americano, limpio de influencias extrañas con su propia idiosincrasia y modo de forjarse sus propias libertades.*

[81] Lil Milagro to Cherie (Luz América) November 5, 1968, AHCPC. Spanish: *A veces me mantiene despierta hasta muy altas horas de la noche. Quizá no debiera preocuparme así, pero me siento como culpable de algo que va a pasar, como si es necesario buscar una solución antes de tirar jornadas. Pero por otro lado, comprendo que si no se realizan Jornadas, todo acaba y muere, ya ves, aquí, dejamos año y medio de lanzarlas.. pero ahí vamos, eso si te lo digo, entusiasmo no nos falta, aunque en el*

After dedicating a year and half of work to this organization, Lil Milagro was afraid that the movement would not be able to sustain itself. Although she did succeed in creating an international meeting of different Jornada chapters in Nicaragua in 1968, the failure of the movement to sufficiently motivate students at the UES led her to search out other options.

The ANDES Strikes

It is not surprising that one of the first secular organizations Lil Milagro joined advocated a better educational system and more support for Salvadoran teachers. Formed in 1965 by a passionate revolutionary woman named Mélida Anaya Montes, ANDES fought, among other things, against a corrupt educational system, while demanding that teachers be paid sufficiently for their work. As an employee in the Ministry of Education, Lil Milagro's mother, Tránsito, understood this issue on a personal basis. In an interview published by Third World Books in 1982,[82] she discussed the Alliance for Progress and how it provided funds for educational purposes which were then used in dubious ways. Specifically, her boss utilized these funds to create television programs on how to conduct proper laboratory work. Meanwhile Transito explains that, "most teachers counted themselves lucky if there was any chalk available. And more importantly, most rural schools don't have electricity, so the television programs could only be used in urban areas." In the end, she reveals the true intention of the program

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Seceretariado estemos solo gente totalmente nueva, y un poco inexperta y ha ta quizá desorientada en ciertos aspectos."

[82] Marilyn Thomson, *Women of El Salvador: The Price of Freedom* (London: Comisión de Derechos Humanos de El Salvador, Zed Books, and War on Want, 1986), p. 73

pointing out that it was a "good business deal for the Minister of Education who had shares in the Japanese company, which sold the television equipment."[83] Corruption like this prompted the teacher's association to become the first organization since 1932 to stage a massive demonstration that criticized key members of the Salvadoran government.

To understand the context of the ANDES protest, however, it is necessary to sketch a rudimentary picture of the political climate at this time. The 1967 elections constituted one of the first times in Salvadoran history that a smooth succession of power for the presidential office occurred. As Colonel Fidel Sánchez Hernández took the presidency from Colonel Julio Adalberto Rivera, the military once again proved to be the chief political force. This time, however, the PDC candidate obtained enough votes to come in second in the election, prompting the middle class to believe that the elections in 1972 would place a more populist president in power.[84]

Inspired by the potential for peaceful change, ANDES began a campaign for better pay and working conditions within the teaching profession. The organization justified its demands by studying the economic viability of increasing teachers' salaries. Through this study, ANDES found that if the state chose to allocate its financial resources equally among its different departments, then a salary increase was not only feasible but easy to implement. This plan became known as the IMPRESS project. Not surprisingly, the Ministry of Education responded to this plan by reassigning key members of ANDES to rural schools, forcing them to live substantial distances from their

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[83] Ibid.

[84] Armstrong and Shenk, *Face of Revolution*, 52.

families, and isolating them from their work in the organization. The government then accused several organizers in ANDES of being subversives, a label that essentially threatened their lives. Finally, in their public speeches the Minister of Education and President Sánchez Hérnandez suggested that ANDES was a small movement with very few participants and that it did not have the support of the masses.

Outraged by these actions and accusations, the organization decided to prove the extent of its support by staging a citywide demonstration in the capital on February 16, 1968. Attacking the unjustified relocation of their members and the corrupt educational reform movement advocated by the government, it became the largest protest in El Salvador's history as 30,000 teachers and students took to the streets with 50,000 more students, workers and people of San Salvador joining them in a massive march.[85] Even the historically conservative periodical *La Prensa Gráfica* recognized the importance of this event stating, "ANDES organized a protest to define its public position in respect to the conflict that resulted from the recent measures taken by the Ministry of Education."[86] Their demands included the reinstatement of jobs for all teachers displaced in the reform, the immediate distribution of salaries to these teachers, and the immediate resignation of

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[85] Lil Milagro to Lupita, February 24, 1968, AHCPC. Spanish: *Participaron alrededor de treinta mil personas, maestros y alumnos, y como cincuenta mil más estudiantes, trabajadores y pueblo.*

[86] No Author, "Miles de Maestro en Manifestacion," *La Prensa Grafica*, February 16, 1968. Spanish: *La ANDES organizó la manifestación para definir ante el público su posición con respecto al conflicto surgido a raíz de las medidas acordadas recientemente por el ministerio de Educación.*

two administrators in the Ministry of Education.[87] A witness and participant in this protest, Lil Milagro described the day:

> More than 30 blocks were filled with people marching, not counting the thousands of observers throughout the city streets. The protest started at a city park, passed through the center of the city in front of the National Palace, and continued toward the President's residence. After surrounding and walking around the residence, the protesters went to the Plaza Libertad and held a protest…during the manifestation, the entire city came together. All the different faculties, colleges, professors, university employees, labor unions, and the three political parties of the opposition, the PDC, MNR, and PRI participated in this march.[88]

The ANDES strikes represented a monumental event in El Salvador's history not only because it galvanized the opposition under a common mission, but also because it was the first demonstration largely led and organized by women.[89] In other words, this organization as well as the teachers who participated in these strikes created a space for others to question the practices of their government. The political scientist Julia Shayne

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[87] Ibid.

[88] Lil Milagro to Lupita, February 24, 1968, AHCPC. Spanish: *Mas de treinta cuadras se cubrieron de personas desfilando, sin tomar en cuenta los miles de personas que observaban a lo largo de toda la ciudad, la manifestación salió de un parque de la capital, pasó por el centro mismo, frente a Palacio Nacional, continuo hacia Casa Presidencial y después de rodearla y dar la vuelta se dirigió hacia la Plaza Libertad en la cual tuvo lugar un Mitin de protesta. En esta heulga manifestación en que el pueblo entero se dio cita, participaron de una manera ordenada, todas las instituciones universitarias, facultad por facultad, los profesores, los trabajadores universitarios, los sindicatos obreros y por supuesto y en primera fila los maestros. Así como también los tres partidos políticos de oposición: Demócrata Cristiano, Nacional Revolucionario y Partido Revolucionario.*

[89] For a more thorough discussion of women's involvement in ANDES and their ability to act as "gendered revolutionary bridges" through this work see Julie Shayne, *The Revolution Question: Feminisms in El Salvador, Chile, and Cuba* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 26-28.

refers to this act as a process where women transformed into "revolutionary bridges." She states,

> Women workers [were] not expected to resist so forcefully, and in doing so en masse the women of ANDES not only shattered stereotypes, but acted as gendered revolutionary bridges by providing a model for other disenchanted sectors of society.[90]

Even many leaders of the FMLN acknowledged that this strike was a model of activism as they pointed to the ANDES strikes as "the turning point in the unfolding of the political crisis of the 1970s and 1980s."[91]

For Lil Milagro, the protest served as a pivotal moment in her life. As a board member of the Directiva de la Asociación de Estudiantes de Derecho at the UES, she was responsible for drafting a formal comment on this situation. In a letter she remarked on this burden, stating "I have an immense responsibility in front of me as a Christian woman, college student and, above all, a Salvadoran."[92] These words not only express the magnitude of Lil Milagro's commitment to her country but also show how her different identities forced her to take action. Through her participation in this public demonstration of defiance and then her public statement of support for these strikes, she not only continued to take an active role in the public sphere of political activity, but also acted according to her perceived responsibility as a Christian woman, student, and Salvadoran. The event marked an important phase in her gradual radicalization.

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[90] Julia Denise Shayne, "Gendered Revolutionary Bridges: Women in the Salvadoran Resistance Movement (1979-1992)," *Latin American Perspectives,* 85-102, 89.

[91] Grenier, *Emergence of Insurgency*, 45.

[92] Lil Milagro to Monstruo Normando, March 7, 1968, AHCPC. Spanish: *tengo inmensa responsabilidad se te presenta como mujer cristiana, como universitaria, como salvadoreña en fin.*

Ironically, the protests also opened Lil Milagro's eyes to the impossibility of realizing social change through peaceful means. Like so many acts of defiance before it, the ANDES strike ended in a manner reminiscent of the repressive tactics used by so many of the country's former presidents. After what became a two-month general strike in which ANDES occupied the public space outside of the Ministry of Education, the government responded by killing two leaders of the organization and a student, while incarcerating and beating hundreds of others. In the end, the military arrested thirty leaders of the organization and "disappeared" two key members. Three days after their disappearance, "their mutilated bodies washed ashore on the Pacific beaches of La Libertad."[93] Many Salvadorans identify this event as the turning point in their country's quest for social change.[94]

For Lil Milagro, the actions of the military were a defining moment in her radicalization. As she stated in a letter to her father in 1971:

> Do you remember that we experienced the first ANDES strike? I was one of the women most absorbed in that fight and my feelings of frustration and impotence started to form at the sight of the defenseless people who asked for justice but were met with only repression and death.[95]

In this same letter, she justified her decision to join an armed revolutionary struggle by explaining that the military's actions in response to the ANDES strikes proved that armed struggle was imperative if her country was to free itself from the grasp of the military.

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[93] Armstrong and Shenk, *Face of Revolution*, 52.

[94] In every interview I conducted, all participants pointed to this event as a crucial moment in forming the attitudes of the people of El Salvador to their government.

[95] Lil Milagro to Father, 1971, AHCPC. Spanish: *¿Recuerdas que nos tocó la primera huelga de ANDES? Fui una de las que más se entregó en aquella batalla y mis sentimientos de frustración e impotencia comenzaron a formarse al ver que al pueblo indefenso que pedía justicia se le respondía con la represión y la muerte.*

She then proceeded to remind her father that he, too, opposed the repressive actions of the Salvadoran government. In fact, as a representative of ANDES he wrote a letter to the president of El Salvador, Sánchez Hernández, that illustrated his passion and resolve for the social change this organization advocated. In it he wrote:

> Did you see the civic demonstrations that gave support to ANDES? We must not close our eyes to reality…Let's not allow the breaking of the constitutional democratic order, on a whim. History has already judged Martínez, the assassin of the masses; Osmín Aguirre y Salinas; José María Lemus, killer of the people and assaulter of Universities…This is a path followed by stubborn oppressors of free people. The people who have suffered, in the long run, will triumph; and this, this is not communism, nor absurd rebellions, instead it is Thirst for Justice and Social Order.[96]

These words suggest that the family was a vital source of Lil Milagro's strong convictions. Yet, she would have one more experience in 1969 that would further radicalize her worldview and convince her that armed revolt was the only solution for her country.

A Journey South

In the spring of 1969, Lil Milagro joined a group of student members of the PDC on a three-month solidarity mission to South America. Traveling to Ecuador, Venezuela, Chile, and Argentina, this journey exposed her to several ways of life that were foreign to what she understood in El Salvador. The international experience not only gave Lil

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[96] José Ramírez, "Carta Abierta al Ejército Salvadoreño," *El Diario de Hoy*, February 21, 1968. Spanish: *Ha visto Ud. Las demostraciones de civismo que ha dado en apoyo a la ANDES…. No debemos cerrar los ojos ante la realidad….haga retroceder la historia señor Presidente y Ejército de la Nación. No dejemos que se rompa el orden constitucional democrático, por un solo capricho. La historia ya juzgó a Martínez, asesino de masas; a Osmín Aguirre y Salinas; a José María Lemus, macerado de pueblos y asaltador de Universidades…camino que corresponde seguir a todos los obstinados y opresores de su pueblo, el cual aunque sufra, a la larga, triunfa; y esto, no es comunismo, ni absurdas rebeldías, sino Sed de Justicia y Orden Social.*

Milagro an example to model, but also changed the expectations she had for her own country.

At the beginning of her trip, Lil Milagro formed relationships with individuals from many different parts of the world. Primarily young and often bohemian in nature, she embraced their youthful exuberance and freedom of expression. The first letter Lil Milagro wrote during her journey paints a picture of a wide-eyed young woman searching for companionship and intellectual experiences in an environment characterized by freedom and collaboration. Upon arriving in the port city of Guayaquil, Ecuador, she wrote:

> We traveled in tourist class, but we enjoyed ourselves more than the bourgeoisie in first; each night we have a dance. As you will understand, students, youth, adventurers, artists, poets, philosophers, writers and nice girls (like myself, for example) travel together in this class, knowing how to live life to its fullest.[97]

Against this backdrop of youthful exploration, Lil Milagro particularly enjoyed collaboration with her peers, a common theme in her life. Eventually she continued on to Caracas, Venezuela, where she spent two weeks taking classes in law and simultaneously exploring her identity as a Latin American woman. We see this perception in a letter where she comments on the feeling of solidarity that she shared with students from other countries in the region. She writes:

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[97] Lil Milagro to Luz América, "Chiqui," May 27, 1969, AHCPC. Spanish: *Vamos en clase turística pero nos divertimos más que los burgueses de primera; nosotros tenemos baile todas las noches y como comprenderás, en esta clase viajan los estudiantes, los jóvenes, los aventureros, los artistas, los poetas, los filósofos, los literatos,…y las chicas simpáticas (como yo, ejem) en fin, aquí viajamos los que sabemos vivir la vida a plenitud.*

> We are learning thousands of great things about social formation, more than we learned in any formal class, when we women talk to each other about different things relating to our countries, which are very Latin American.[98]

This identity shift from viewing herself as a Latin American rather than Salvadoran is significant because it illustrates her ability to apply her own situation to those found in other countries throughout the region. In other words, finding just societies in Latin America and hearing the stories of her companions, helped her realize that her country needed help and that change was possible. As her journey through South America continued, this exposure to an outside world intensified her convictions about justice particularly after her visits to Chile and Argentina.

"What a large place Buenos Aires is, but so is Argentina."[99] These were the first words that Lil Milagro wrote about this South American country. Traveling by bus through the Andes could easily have this impact, especially when you come from a place relatively the size of Massachusetts. Her letters from Argentina reveal a deep fascination with the environment. Adding to her awe was the fact that up to this point in her life she had never seen snow, much less several of feet of it in the mountains. Despite her fascination with the Andean landscape of western Argentina, Chile's open political system especially drew her attention.

"Chile has experienced more than 30 years without knowing what tyranny or a military dictator is," Lil Milagro wrote to her father. "The Chileans are horrified and they

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[98] Lil Milagro to Luz América, "Chiquitina", April 30, 1969, AHCPC. Spanish: *aquí estamos enterándonos de mil cosas buenas para la formación social, más que en las clases, cuando hablamos las unas con las otras de las realidades de nuestros respectivos países, que son en definitiva Latinoamericanos.*

[99] Lil Milagro to Luz América, "Chiquitina," June 26, 1969, AHCPC. Spanish: *Que cosa tan grande es Buenos Aires, pero que cosa tan grande es la Argentina.*

think that we are exaggerating when we explain to them the difficult political reality that exists in Central America."[100] Such statements reflect the progressive nature of politics in Chile at this time. With Latin America's most recognized Christian Democrat in power, Eduardo Frei improved access to education, authorized the nationalization of the copper industry, and instituted successful land reform. He even expanded the freedom of the press, a concept that was astonishing to Lil Milagro. She commented on this in the same letter to her father, explaining her surprise at the idea that radio and television broadcasters did not need to live in fear of telling the truth. Perhaps the most astounding difference in Chile, however, was the fact that the Communist Party was allowed to participate in the political system.[101] Coming from El Salvador, where the Communist Party was not only the most radical party but also banned from the political system, Chile's electoral politics impressed this young woman.

In such a progressive milieu, Lil Milagro was shocked to discover that students at the university in Santiago used violence to achieve their ends. She explained that second to the legislation passed to nationalize copper, the most serious problem emanated from the university where students were using bombs and kidnappings to terrorize the city and in the process create their own revolution against Frei. In a place like Chile, Lil Milagro found their actions to be unjustifiable. As she wrote to her father, "the truth is that I can justify violent actions when there is no other way for a country to protest injustice, but in

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[100] Lil Milagro to Father "Papy," June 26, 1969, AHCPC. Spanish: *Chile tiene más de 30 años de no saber lo que es una tiranía o una dictadura militar, los chilenos se horrorizan y hasta piensan que exageramos cuando les contamos la dura realidad política que vive Centro América.*

[101] Ibid., Spanish: *la TV y las radio difusoras no temen hablar y decir la verdad, el partido comunista está legalizado y tiene hasta diputados y senadores*

a place like Chile where everyone has opportunities and guarantees for using the electoral process to gain power, it is unjustifiable and even criminal."[102] Nevertheless, one of the few pictures of her in Chile shows Lil Milagro participating in a student strike at the university. Her participation in this event suggests that the revolutionary culture at the university was too attractive to remain on the sidelines. Her journey to South America was a time for experiential learning, and thus she valued the experience of this strike enough that she chose to participate in the demonstration.

In her final days in Chile, Lil Milagro discovered a remarkable process in which communities promoted a better way of living in their respective townships. Organized by mothers forming groups of 30 or 40 women, these committees would study problems in the family and the community and then devise solutions for these issues. These groups were so successful that an organization called CEMA, or Centros de Madres, emerged to form a place of work for the different representatives of each community. Here, mothers would organize fundraising events and parties for different communities. More importantly, CEMA became a strong political organization that could demand change from the government, particularly during elections. Lil Milagro believed that such a system might work in El Salvador, and she expressed an interest in studying this grassroots movement and transplanting it to her own country.[103]

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[102] Ibid., Spanish: *la verdad es que yo justifico los actos violentos cuando ya no hay otra manera de reivindicar un país, pero en un lugar como Chile donde se tienen todas las oportunidades y garantías para subir al poder a través del proceso electoral, es injustificable y hasta criminal*

[103] Ibid. Spanish: *Hay en Chile otro proceso extraordinario que es lo que más me interesa y que pienso estudiar con más ahínco se trata de la promoción popular, de la organización del pueblo en sus bares, pero no a través de organismos estatales que bajen hasta el pueblo sino al contrario; el pueblo mismo va formando grupos que al ir*

Chile offered Lil Milagro concrete experiences illustrating that society could function in a way that respected diverse opinions and encouraged political action. Many of her friends and relatives point to her time in South America as a turning point in her intellectual development. Her sister Luz América, for instance, explained that "she met many people with advanced ideas, which nourished the seed of her radicalization."[104] Miriam Medrano suggested that after returning from Chile, Lil Milagro became disenchanted with life at the UES because she did not think social change could occur through the university.[105] Although it is difficult to measure the exact influence the experience in Chile had on her worldview, once she returned to El Salvador she began to view armed struggle as the only way to bring change in her country.

Conclusion

When Lil Milagro began her career at the UES, she entered an environment that attracted some of the most notable revolutionaries who would later fight in the civil war that began in 1980 and ended in 1992. Her relationships with many of these individuals influenced her intellectual development. Concurrently, these influences were not the sole reason behind her eventual radicalization.

The years between 1964 and 1970 exposed Lil Milagro to ideas that were both foreign and familiar to her own worldview. Whether it was her work with Jornadas, forming literary groups, teaching at her former high school, traveling abroad, or

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creciendo presionan hacia arriba en busca de canales de expresión por medio de los cuales participan directamente en el destino de la nación

[104] Interview, Luz América, August 13, 2006, Reseda, CA.

[105] Interview, Miriam Medrano, June 8, 2006, San Salvador, El Salvador.

participating in the ANDES strikes, Lil Milagro's identity and intellectual evolution changed and adapted to her environment and the multiple groups she claimed as her audience. These years illustrate that Lil Milagro worked through the intellectual dialectic as she subjected her ideas to different audiences until finally concluding that social change required an armed resistance. Throughout these experiences, however, the core of her identity remained committed to a Christian view of the world that emphasized social justice and equality. As the next chapter will show, this understanding joined forces with the Marxist ideology of her colleagues in the ERP. Together, these ideas helped her develop a syncretic socialism that combined Christian social gospel with ideas relating to Marxist understandings of class struggle, an emphasis on social and economic equality, and an end to a government controlled by an elite oligarchy.

Figure 1: Lil Milagro entering the UES, 1963.

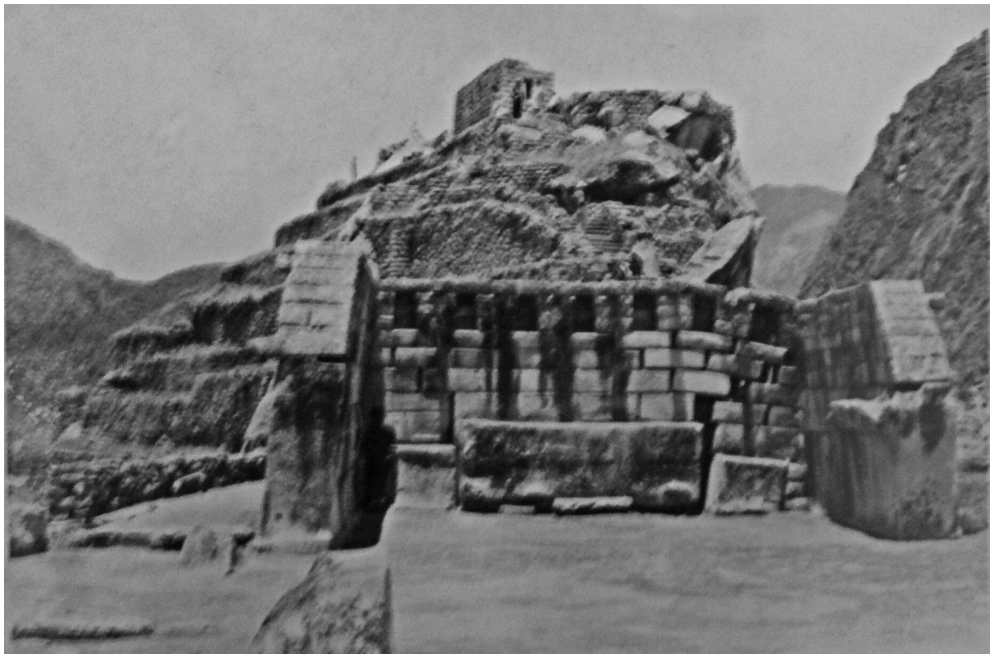


Figure 2: Lil Milagro at Machu Picchu, 1967.

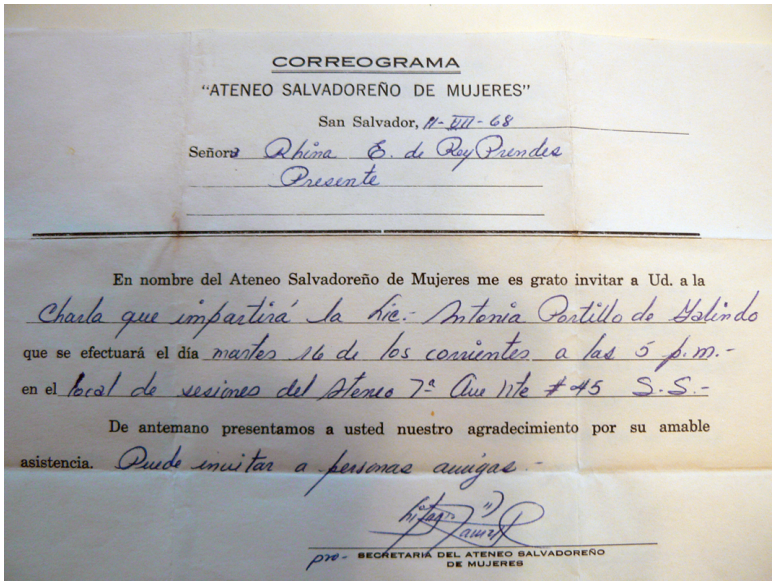
Lil Milagro is the dark figure standing in the shadows on the left of the alter.

Figure 3: Lil Milagro working with La Jornada, circa 1966.

Figure 4: Lil Milagro participating in a student strike in Chile, 1969.

Lil Milagro is the fourth person on the back row.

Figure 5: The first and only issue of *Péndulo*, created by Alba 13, October 1963.



CORREOGRAMA

"ATENEO SALVADOREÑO DE MUJERES"

San Salvador, 11-VIII-68

Señora: Rhina S. de Roy Prendes

Presente

En nombre del Ateneo Salvadoreño de Mujeres me es grato invitar a Ud. a la Charla que impartirá la Lic.- Antonia Portillo de Yolindo que se efectuará el día martes 16 de los corrientes a las 5 p.m.- en el local de sesiones del Ateneo 7ª Ave Nte #45 S.S.-

De antemano presentamos a usted nuestro agradecimiento por su amable asistencia. Puede invitar a personas amigas.-

pro- SECRETARIA DEL ATENEO SALVADOREÑO DE MUJERES

Figure 6: Lil Milagro's signature (bottom right), as the secretary of the "Ateneo Salvadoreño de Mujeres." November, 1968.