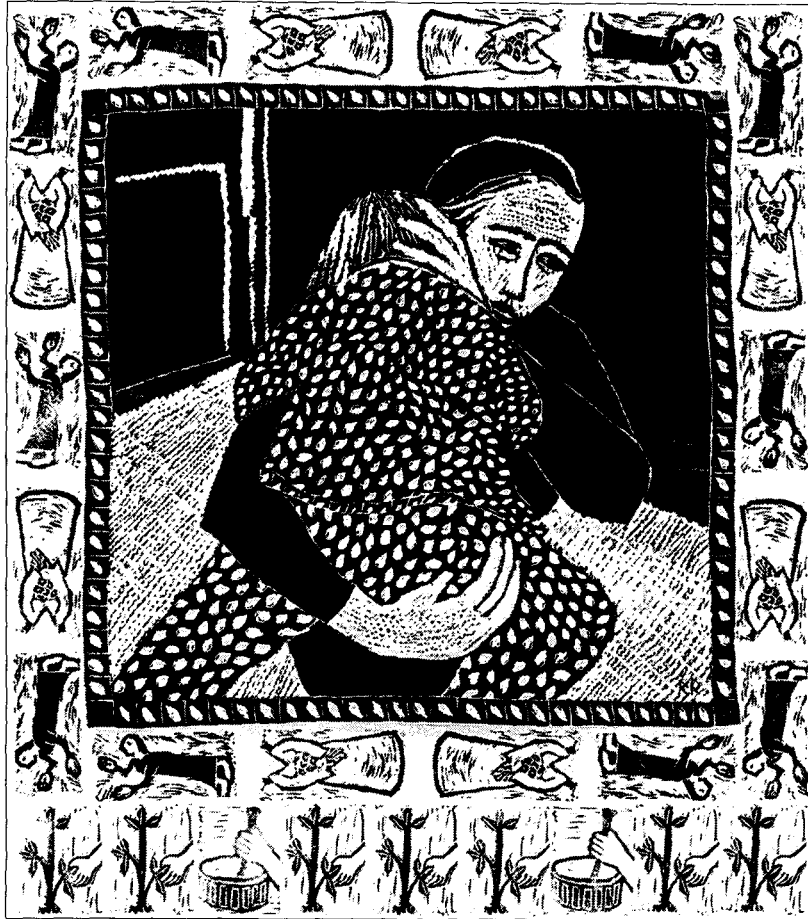


Diana Taylor

Making a Spectacle: *The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*

Arm in arm, wearing their white head scarves, the Mothers slowly walk around the Plaza de Mayo, Argentina's central square. Some carry huge placards with the smiling faces of their missing children. Others hang small photographs around their necks. Turning their bodies into walking billboards, they carry banners demanding "*Aparición con vida*,"—that their children be brought "back alive." On any given Thursday afternoon at 3:30pm, hundreds of women meet in the square to demand justice for the human rights violations committed by the brutal military dictatorship that abducted, tortured and permanently "disappeared" 30,000 Argentineans between 1976 and 1983, a period that came to be known as the "Dirty War." The Plaza, facing the presidential palace, lies in the heart of Buenos Aires' financial and economic district. Businessmen and politicians hurry to and fro, sometimes crossing the street to distance themselves from the Mothers. The women continue to talk and comfort each other as they walk, stopping every so often to gather around the microphone and loudspeakers from which they and their leader, Hebe de Bonafini, broadcast their accusations to the country's president. *Where are our children? We want them back alive! Why did their torturers and murders get away with murder? When will justice be done?* Until these issues are resolved, the women claim the Dirty War will not be over. Nor will their demonstrations.

The spectacle of elderly women in white scarves carrying placards with the huge faces of their missing children has become an icon of women's resistance movements, especially in Latin America where their group has become the model for dozens of similar grass-roots, human rights organizations. This article focuses on how the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo staged their opposition to the three consecutive military juntas that controlled Argentina between 1976 and 1983. While much has been written on the Mothers'



Rochelle Rubinstein, "Shelter No. 30," 90 x 100 cm.,
Linocut printed, softoleum printed, and embroidered silk, 1995.

movement, few people have looked at how their spectacle fit into or contested the military junta's spectacle of national identity and cohesion. As the political Fathers of the nation persecuted and killed its opposition in the name of Christian, western and family values, the Mothers made visible the violence and hypocrisy that underwrote the junta's "process of national reorganization."

In its first pronouncement immediately following the coup, published on the front page of a major centrist daily paper, *La Nación*, March 25, 1976, the junta declared itself the "supreme organ of the Nation" ready to "fill the void of power" embodied by Perón's widow, María Estela Martínez de Perón ("Isabelita"), Argentina's constitutional president. With a show of muscle, the junta undertook its exercise in national body-building, determined to transform the "infirm," inert Argentine masses into an authentic, implicitly masculine, "national being." The military heralded its accession to power as the

“dawning of a fecund epoch,” although the generative process was not, as it recognized, strictly speaking “natural.” “Isabelita’s” government was sick; its “productive apparatus” was exhausted; “natural” solutions were no longer sufficient to insure a full “recuperation.”

The military represented itself as a disciplined masculine body, aggressively visible, all surface, identifiable by its uniforms, ubiquitous, on parade for all the world to see. The display of the military leaders in church or with the Catholic archbishops aligned military and sacred power. Staging order was perceived as a way of making order happen. The junta’s display both re-enacted and constituted the new social order: all male, Catholic and strictly hierarchical. The unholy trinity—Army, Navy and Air Force—were depicted as one entity, set-apart as in religious iconography, the embodiment of national aspirations of grandeur. They spoke as one central, unified subject; their “we” supposedly included everyone. Visually, the spectacle affirmed the centrality of the junta and emphasized the importance of hierarchy and rank by distancing the great leaders from their undifferentiated followers.

From its opening address, the junta made explicit that the maternal image of the *Patria* or Motherland justified the civil violence. The military claimed it had to save “her,” for “she” was being “raped,” “penetrated” and “infiltrated” by her enemies.¹ But “she” was also the site of the conflict, as the Dirty War was carried out in the interstices of the *Patria*, in her very entrails. General Jorge Videla, President of the junta, declared that the *Patria* was “bleeding to death. When it most urgently needs her children, more and more of them are submerged in her blood” (cited in Troncoso, 1984: 59). But it is interesting to note that *Patria*, which comes from Padre or father, does not mean *fatherland* in Spanish. Rather, the word *Patria* signals the image of motherland as envisioned by patriarchy. Thus, the word itself alerts us to the dangerously slippery positioning of the “feminine” in this discourse. There is no woman behind the maternal image invoked by the military. The term *Patria* merely projects the masculinist version of maternity—patriarchy in drag. In the name of the *Patria*, this nonexistent yet “pure” feminine image, the military justified its attack on its own population. However, depicting the physical site of violence as feminine had devastating repercussions on the lives of real-life women. The very notion of the feminine was split in two—into the “good” woman and the “bad” woman. On the one hand, the junta honored the symbolic image of pure motherhood associated with the *Patria*, the “good” woman, and made clear to women that their role was also to be “pure,” that is non-political, mothers confined to the private sphere. On the other hand, active women were “bad” women, associated with deviance and subversion. Women who were not content to stay home were often targeted as enemies of the State.

During the Dirty War—so called because it was a terrorist civil conflict rather than a conventional war with two armed sides that abides by the international rules of war—there were mothers who were willing to go along with the junta’s version of “good” women. They supported the military’s

mission and encouraged it to exercise even more control over the public good. In 1977, the League of Mothers of Families, sounding much like the Christian Right in the U.S. today, urged their rulers to ensure that “education strengthened traditional and Christian values” and asked that “the media be truly instruments of culture, diffusing good examples and healthy entertainment” (Avellaneda, 1986: 148). The media, under military direction, not surprisingly carried interviews and reports on “good” women, those who were happiest in the home, looking after their children. Mothers were warned that their sons and daughters were in grave danger because the *guerrillas* were just waiting to lure them into subversion. The radio, television and magazines bombarded women with the question, “Señora, do you know where your children are?” The junta demanded that women put State interests over familial bonds.

In the midst of this brutal and repressive political climate, when most members of the opposition were either in exile, in hiding, in concentration camps or jails, the Mothers went to the Plaza de Mayo, the most public space in Argentina, to protest that it was the military that posed the gravest threat to their children. To protest the Armed Forces “disappearance” of their children, the Mothers had to manipulate the maternal image that was already rigorously controlled by the State. They claimed that it was precisely their maternal responsibilities as “good” mothers that took them to the Plaza in search of their children.

For those unfamiliar with the Mothers’ movement, here is a brief overview. In 1977, fourteen women first took to the Plaza to collectively demand information concerning the whereabouts of their missing children. They had met in government offices, prisons and courts looking for any sign of their sons and daughters. Little by little, the women came to identify as a group, and called themselves simply the “Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo.” They started wearing white head kerchiefs to recognize each other and to be recognized by onlookers. The Mothers realized that only by being visible could they be politically effective. Only by being visible could they stay alive in a society in which all opposition was annihilated by the military. The role of “mother” offered the women a certain security in the initial phase of their movement. The junta, which legitimated its mission with the rhetoric of Christian and family values, could hardly gun down defenseless mothers in public. So it tried dismissing the Mothers as “crazy old women” or *locas* and threatened the women individually in their homes and on their way to and from the Plaza. But even after the Mothers were threatened, they returned to the Plaza every Thursday afternoon to walk counterclockwise around the obelisk in front of the presidential Casa Rosada.

Gradually, the number of women grew. They belonged to different social classes, though the majority were working class. They represented different religious groups and came from different parts of Argentina. In July there were 150 *Madres*. Public response to their activities was mixed. Most Argentines

tried to ignore them, crossing the street to distance themselves as much as possible from the women. Some passersby insulted them. Others whispered support and solidarity. On October 5, 1977 the Mothers placed an ad in *La Prensa* demanding the “truth” about 237 disappeared persons, accompanied by pictures of the victims and the signatures and identity card numbers of the women in the movement. They got no reply. Ten days later, hundreds of women delivered a petition with 24,000 signatures demanding an investigation into the disappearances. The police tried to disperse them—spraying tear gas at the women, shooting bullets into the air and detaining over 300 for questioning. Foreign correspondents, the only ones to cover the event, were also arrested.

News of the Mothers and their anti-junta activities soon spread internationally. The battle for visibility commanded more and more spectators. Largely due to the public recognition and financial support from human rights groups from the Netherlands, Sweden, France and Italy, the Mothers were able to survive politically and financially. Amnesty International sent a mission to Argentina in 1976 to report on the disappeared. In 1977, President Carter sent Patricia Derian, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, to investigate the accusations of human rights abuses. She estimated that three thousand people had been executed and five thousand disappeared (Simpson and Bennett, 1985: 279). The United States cut military aid to Argentina and canceled \$270 million in loans. The junta realized that they could not dismiss the Mothers as “mad women;” they had to get rid of them. So in December of 1977, the junta infiltrated the Mothers’ organization and kidnapped and disappeared twelve women, including their leader, Azucena de Vicenti, and two French nuns who were working with the Mothers’ movement. But in spite of the danger, the Mothers returned to the Plaza. During 1978, the military intensified its harassment and detentions. In 1979, it became impossible for the Mothers to enter the Plaza that was cordoned off by heavily armed police. The women would stand around the Plaza and raid it—dashing across the square before the Police could stop them, only to remind the world and themselves that this was still their space.

In 1979, the Organization of American States (OAS) sent the Inter-American Human Rights Commission to Argentina. The Mothers brought women from all over the country to testify before the commission in Buenos Aires. As many as 3,000 people lined up at a time to meet with the commission (Navarro, 1989). The junta, unable to block the investigation, launched its own counter-attack, inscribing slogans on people, and mimicking the visual strategies the Mothers used. They made up posters and used people’s bodies as walking billboards marked with a pun on human rights: “Somos derechos y humanos” (We are right and human). That same year, practically banished from the Plaza, the Mothers formed the Association of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. In January 1980, the Mothers returned to the Plaza, ready to face death before relinquishing it again.

The Mothers' performance of motherhood tried to bridge the schism between the "good" woman and the "bad" woman belaboured by the military. The women consciously modelled themselves on the Virgin Mary, the ultimate mother who transcends the public/private bind by carrying her privacy with her even in public. Thus, Christian and Jewish women alike initially played the *Mater Dolorosa* and exploited a system of representations and stereotypes that had so effectively limited most forms of female visibility and expression: "At first they marched as if in ritual procession: faces serious, eyes turned upward in supplication, heads covered... peaceful, rapt, pleading" (Diago, 1988: 29). The virginal role allowed the women to perform traditionally acceptable "feminine" qualities—self-sacrifice, suffering, irrationality, even as they took one of the most daring steps imaginable in their particular political arena: they affirmed their passivity and powerlessness. Yet even that virginal role—sanctified by Argentine society though it was—did not protect the women for long. The women's public exposure resulted in their being ostracized from the Church. They had gone beyond the representational constraints of the role: pain was permissible, perhaps, but not anger. Silence, maybe, but not protest. As one of the Church leaders, Monsignor Quarracino commented: "I can't imagine the Virgin Mary yelling, protesting and planting the seeds of hate when her son, our Lord, was torn from her hands" (cited in Rossi, 1989).

Over the years, the Mothers' notion of motherhood had gradually become political rather than biological. They came to consider themselves the mothers of all the disappeared, not just their own offspring. Their spectacles became larger and increasingly dramatic. They organized massive demonstrations and marches, some of them involving up to 200,000 people: the March of Resistance in 1981, and again the following year; in 1982 the March for Life and the March for Democracy; in 1983, at the end of the last military junta, they plastered Buenos Aires with the names and silhouettes of the disappeared. However, even with the return of a democratic government, their demands for information about the fate of the children and justice for their tormentors had not been addressed. In spite of the Trial of the Generals, only a handful of the military leaders had been sentenced to prison terms. All those who had served as torturers and on the para-military "task forces" that abducted, tortured and killed thousands of people were still free. In 1986, when it became clear that Raúl Alfonsín's elected government would do nothing meaningful to punish those responsible for the atrocities, the Mothers staged the March for Human Rights as a procession of masks.

The Mothers spoiled the junta's parade by responding to the military spectacle with a spectacle that inverted the focus. What had been invisible before—from domestic women to "subversives"—was now visible for the world to see. Through their bodies, they wanted to show the absence/presence of all those who had disappeared without a trace, without leaving a body. Clearly, the confrontation between the Mothers and the military centered on the physical and symbolic location of the missing body—object of exchange in this battle of

images. While the military attempted to make their victims invisible and anonymous by burying them in unmarked graves, dumping their bodies into the sea or cutting them up and burning them in ovens, the Mothers insisted that the disappeared had names and faces. They were people; people did not simply disappear; their bodies, dead or alive, were somewhere; someone had done something to them. Instead of the military's a-historical forgetting, the Mothers inscribed the time and dates of the disappearances. Instead of dismembering, remembering. The Mothers challenged the generals' claim to history by writing themselves and the "disappeared" into the narrative, literally as well as figuratively. Their bodies, inscribed with names, dates and faces were "written into the message" to borrow a phrase from Ross Chambers.² Opposed to the image projected by the junta of a lone, heroic male leaving family and community behind, the Mothers emphasized community and family ties. Instead of the military's performance of hierarchy, represented by means of rigid, straight rows, the Mothers' circular movements around the Plaza, characterized by their informal talk and pace, bespoke values based on egalitarianism and communication. While the soldiers' uniforms, paraphernalia and body language emphasized the performative aspects of gender, the Mothers too were highly conscious of the importance of their gender role, specifically their maternal role, and played it accordingly. The Mothers also had their "uniforms," though these may not have been immediately identifiable as such. They presented themselves as elderly, physically weak and sexually non-active women. Yet they resisted even the most brutal treatment. When the military tried to force the women from the Plaza, they marked their presence indelibly by painting white kerchiefs around the circle where they usually walked. Instead of the empty streets and public spaces mandated by the military curfew, the Mothers orchestrated the return of the repressed. Buenos Aires was once again filled with people; spectacular bodies, ghostly, looming figures who refused to stay invisible. The public spaces overflowed with demonstrators as the terrorized population gradually followed the Mothers' example and took to the streets.

However, re-defining motherhood was a painful process for the Mothers. Individually, many of the women admitted that they had lost hope of finding their children alive: "We know we're not going to find our children by going to the square, but it's an obligation we have to all the *desaparecidos*" (Fisher, 1989: 153). The tension between the biological death of their children and the living political issue of disappearance and criminal politics placed them in a conflicted situation. Were they now simply the mothers of dead children? If so, should they claim the dead bodies offered up by forensic specialists, accept compensation for their loss, and get on with their lives? Or did they need to hold onto the image of the "disappeared" in order to bring the military to justice and continue their political movement? Could the Mothers, now a political organization, survive the death of their children? By 1986, the dilemma had split the group in two.³ The division continues to shape the political movement.

The group that now calls itself the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, headed by Hebe Bonafini (as opposed to the “Linea Fundadora” or the “Founding Group” of the fourteen original members, headed by Renee Epelbaum) felt committed to keeping the “desaparecidos” alive. They continue to demand “*Aparición con vida*” (“Back Alive”) for all the disappeared. They refuse to give up the struggle until justice has been served. The Linea Fundadora, though accepting that their children are dead, continues to work to bring the perpetrators to justice. However, the women felt that many of the working class members of the organization needed the economic compensation offered by the government in order to keep up their struggle. Members of both groups travel, lecture abroad and document their history. Both groups—made up mainly by women in their 60s and 70s, continue to march around the Plaza de Mayo.

Commentators find it hard to agree on the short and long-term effects of the Mothers’ activism. During the Dirty War, the Mothers provided the families of the disappeared a model of resistance to atrocity as well as a network of communication and support. The Mothers would find out information about a detained or disappeared person and transmit it nationally. The women raised money to allow families around the country to travel to ask about their missing children or to visit a political prisoner. The Mothers’ organization contributed money to raise the children of the disappeared who had been left behind with relatives or friends. Long term, however, some commentators stress that the Mothers changed little in Argentina. There were fewer women voted into positions of power after the Dirty War than before. Some say that the Mothers’ grass-roots movement lacked any lasting organizational structure. The women undoubtedly called international attention to civil rights violations taking place in Argentina. But that, in itself, did not topple the dictatorship. The downfall of the military came with its invasion of the Islas Malvinas, the British-owned Falkland Islands that lie off the coast of Argentina. Plagued by a crashing economy and an increasingly irate population, the military decided to bolster their popular support by taking back the islands. The Armed Forces miscalculated Britain’s resolve to keep the islands—for one thing, the islands have substantial oil deposits, for another, Margaret Thatcher herself needed a boost in popular opinion. The humiliating defeat of the Argentine military, which was also held responsible for the death of a thousand very young conscripts who had not been trained or prepared for war, brought down the last of the three juntas.

Moreover, though the Mothers’ spectacle was a powerful manifestation of personal courage and moral resistance to oppression, it did little to stop international aid to the Armed Forces. Though Carter took the atrocity seriously and cut aid to Argentina, the United States under Reagan increased its support of the armed forces and their “war” on subversion.

So how to assess and understand the Mothers’ movement? Commentators interested in the Mothers’ and other women’s political groups in and outside Latin America have pointed out the many contradictions posed by their

movement—it attacked the legitimacy of the military but left a restrictive patriarchal system basically unchallenged. The Mothers won significant political power, but they claim not to want that power, at least not for themselves but only for their children. The women’s shared struggle for missing children bridged class and religious barriers in Argentina, but the Mothers have not politicized those issues. They recognize that “women are doubly oppressed, especially in Catholic-Hispanic countries” (Fisher, 1989: 155), and they have formed alliances with women’s coalitions in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Uruguay, Colombia, Chile and other Latin American countries. But they are not feminists, if by feminism one refers to the politicization of the women’s subordinate status. Hebe de Bonafini states the following: “I don’t think the Mothers are feminists, but we point a way forward for the liberation of women. We support the struggle of women against this *machista* world and sometimes this means that we have to fight against men. But we also have to work together with men to change this society. We aren’t feminists because I think feminism, when its taken too far, is the same as *machismo*” (Fisher, 1989: 158). The Mothers left the confines of their homes, physically and politically, but they have not altered the politics of the home—for example, the gendered division of labor. After coming home from their demonstrations most of them still cooked and did housework for their remaining family, even in those cases in which the husbands were at home full time. The Mothers took to the streets in order to protect their children and families; nonetheless, their political activity estranged many of them from the surviving members of their families who were not prepared to accept the women’s new roles: “They say if you stop going to the square, you’re one of us again. My family now are the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo,” says one Mother (Fisher, 1989: 156). Having left home, they have established a new *casa* (or *home*) for their new family. There, they continue their unpaid labor, their political activity. There, too, they nurture the young people who come to talk to them: “We cook for them, we worry about their problems, we look out for them much as we did for our children” (Diago, 1988: 187).

How to explain these contradictions? Some of them can be understood, I believe, by distinguishing between the Mothers’ performance of motherhood and the essentialist notions of motherhood sometimes attributed to them and which, in all fairness, the Mothers themselves often accentuate. Although much has been written about the Mothers’ strategy of politicizing motherhood, little has been said about the fact that motherhood—as a role—had already been socialized and politicized in their patriarchal society. What we see, then, are conflicting performances of motherhood, one supporting the military’s version of social order, one defying it.⁴ Once the Mothers decided to march, their self-representation was as theatrical as the military’s. The Mothers’ movement did not begin when the individual mothers became acquainted in their search for their children. It originated when the women consciously decided to protest and agitate *as* mothers. That *as* marks the conceptual

distance between the essentialist notion of motherhood attributed to the Mothers and the self-conscious manipulation of the maternal role that makes the movement the powerful and intensely dramatic spectacle that it has been. The women, most of whom had no political background or experience, realized that they were a part of a national spectacle and decided to actively play the role that had traditionally been assigned to them—the “good” women who look after their children. Yet, they shifted the site of their enactment from the private sphere—where it could be construed as essentialist—to the public—where it became a bid for political recognition and a direct challenge to the junta. The Mothers’ decision to make their presence visible in the Plaza, stage-center so to speak, was a brilliant and courageous move. While the Plaza had often been used as a political stage throughout Argentina’s history, no one had used it as the Mothers did, much less during a state of siege in which public space was heavily policed. They perceived and literally acted out the difference between motherhood as an individual identity (which for many of them it was) and motherhood as a collective, political performance that would allow women to protest in the face of a criminal dictatorship. The role of mother was attractive, not because it was “natural,” but because it was viable and practical. It offered the women a certain legitimacy and authority in a society that values mothers almost to the exclusion of all other women. It offered them visibility in a representational system that rendered most women invisible. For once, they manipulated the images that had previously controlled them.

Looking beyond the maternal role, however, and looking at the individual women who walked away from the Plaza, I see a group of women who redefined the meaning of “mothers,” “family” and “home” in a patriarchal society. Mothers, flesh and blood women, are now freer to act and take to the streets. They can be bold, independent, political and outraged even as they take on the role of the submissive, domestic creature. Their new “home” is a negotiated space; their new “family” founded on political rather than biological ties. What has been accepted as the Mothers’ traditionalism in fact has more to do with the negotiated alliances advocated by feminists. The women may choose to adhere to their old ways, re-create a “family” and cook for the younger members of the group, but that is now a choice they exercise. Their political activism, explicitly designed to empower the new “Man,” in fact made new people out of the Mothers, people with options. As Hebe says, “For me cooking for 20 is the same as cooking for one, and we like to eat together because this is also a part of our struggle and our militancy. I want to continue being the person I’ve always been. Sometimes I’m criticized for wearing a housecoat and slippers in public but I’m not going to change. Of course my life is different” (Fisher, 1989: 158). The performance of motherhood has created a distance between “I” and the “person I’ve always been.” It is as if the women’s conscious performance of motherhood—limited though it was—freed them from the socially restrictive role of motherhood that had previously kept them in their place. The performance offered that disruptive space, that moment of transition between the “I”

who was a mother and the “I” who chooses to perform motherhood.

The performative aspect of their movement, though seldom commented upon, was a politically vital and personally liberating aspect of the Mothers’ activism in several ways. For one, the demonstrations offered the women a way of coping with their grief and channeling it to life-affirming action. Rather than trivialize or eclipse their loss, the performative nature of their demonstrations gave the women a way of dealing with it. Much as in the case of mourning rites, aesthetic distancing is an enabling response to pain, not its negation. For another, the ritualistic and “restored” nature of their demonstrations succeeded in drawing much needed public attention to their cause, both nationally and internationally. This put them in contact with human rights organizations worldwide and provided them with financial and moral support as well as the much-needed legitimacy to offset the junta’s claims that the women were only raving “madwomen.” Moreover, the “restored” nature of their public action in itself was a way of restoring the disappeared into the public sphere, of making visible their absence. And, by bringing motherhood out of the domestic closet, the Mothers showed up the predicament facing women in Argentina and the world over. Traditionally, mothers have been idealized as existing somehow beyond or above the political arena. Confined to the home, they have been made responsible for their children. But what happens to the mothers who, by virtue of that same responsibility to their children, must go looking for them outside the home and confront the powers that be? Do they cease to be mothers? Or must onlookers renounce notions of mothers as a-political? Their transgression of traditional roles made evident how restrictive and oppressive those roles had been. Thus their performance of mothers as activists challenged traditional maternal roles and called attention to the fact that motherhood was a social, not just biological, construct.

The Mothers’ performance, like all performances, challenged the onlooker. Would the national and international spectators applaud their actions, or look away? Join their movement or cross the street to avoid them? One letter to the editor of *La Nación* asked the authorities to put an end “to the sad spectacle that we must endure week after week” (1981: 6). But there were spectators who were able to respond as reliable audiences/witnesses, either because they saw the event from a safe distance or because they felt they had nothing more to lose. They helped introduce different perspectives and disrupt the show the military was staging about itself. The fact the *Madres* could not do *everything*—i.e., seriously challenge patriarchal authority—does not mean that they did *nothing* to ruin their parade. The Mothers’ efficacy and survival relied on capturing the attention of spectators—Argentines who might dare to re-interpret the junta’s version of events as well as the foreign spectators who might feel compelled to bring pressure to bear on their governments.

The Mothers had the courage to show the world what was happening in Argentina. They still continue their walk around the Plaza at 3:30 on Thursday afternoons. They vow to do so until the government officially explains what

Diana Taylor

happened to their missing children and brings their murderers to justice. There has been no closure. The drama of disappearance is not over.

Originally published in Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology, edited by Jan Cohen-Cruz (Routledge, 1998). Reprinted with permission.

¹President Videla of the Junta in his first address to the nation on March 25, 1976 claimed that the “subversives” were “raping” the society (*La Nación*, 1976: 14) and other military spokespeople warned against “Marxist penetration” and “ideological infiltration” (*La Nación*, 1976: 1).

²See Chambers (1992). My discussion later on “identity politics” and “cultural politics” is based in part on his observations.

³I disagree with Snitow’s (1989) assessment that the *Madres* split “along the feminist divide” (49). Both groups, as I see it, have an ambivalent relationship to feminism. According to the Madres de la Plaza faction, tensions started in the group after Alfonsín came to office at the end of 1983. The Linea Fundadora, they maintain, wanted to negotiate with Alfonsín and take a more pacifist line. There was also an election in the movement in January, 1986, which intensified the suspicion and resentment among the women and provoked the final rupture (see Diago, 1988: 193-195).

⁴There was a pro-military league of mothers, who called themselves “La Liga de Madres de Familia” that organized to ask the Junta for a more forceful implementation of “family values”: “Of our leaders we ask for legislation to protect and defend the family, the pillar of society: an ordinance in favor of education that secures traditional and Christian values, and the necessary means so that the media can be a true instrument of culture, broadcasting good example and healthy diversion” (Avellaneda, 1986: 148).

References

- Avellaneda, Andres. (1986). *Censura, Autoritarismo y Cultura: Argentina 1960-1983*. Vol. 2. Buenos Aires: Biblioteca Politica Argentina.
- Chambers, Ross. (1992, Summer). “No Montagues Without Capulets: Some Thoughts on Cultural Identity.” Public Lecture, School of Criticism and Theory, Dartmouth College.
- Diago, Alejandro. (1988). *Hebe Bonafini: Memoria y Esperanza*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Dialectica.
- Fisher, Jo. (1989). *Mothers of the Disappeared*. Boston: South End Press.
- La Nación* June 1, 1981.
- La Nación* March 25, 1976.
- La Nación* August 5, 1976
- Navarro, Marysa. (1989). “The Personal is Political: Madres de Plaza de

- Mayo." *Power and Popular Protest*. Ed. Susan Eckstein. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rossi, Laura. (1989). "¿Cómo pensar a las Madres de Plaza de Mayo?" *Nuevo Texto Critico*, No 4 (II). Eds. Mary Louse Pratt and Marta Morello Frosch. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 145-53.
- Simpson, John and Jana Bennett. (1985). *The Disappeared: Voices from a Secret War*. London: Robinson Books.
- Snitow, Ann. (1989). "A Gender Diary." *Rocking the Ship of State. Toward a Feminist Peace Politics*. Eds. Adrienne Harris and Ynestra King. Boulder, CO: Westview. 40.
- Troncoso, Oscar . (1984). *El Proceso de Reorganizaion Nacional*. Vol. 1. Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latin.