

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: ESSENTIALLY POWERFUL: POLITICAL MOTHERHOOD IN THE UNITED STATES AND ARGENTINA

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“Essentially Powerful” explores the roles of essentialism around motherhood in the political protests of two groups in the United States and Argentina. Another Mother for Peace in the U.S. and the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina based their protests on their identities as mothers, authorizing themselves to challenge their states’ actions around their children. The states themselves also used the figure of the mother to promote specific behaviors that limited political opposition. The contrast between these two approaches problematizes the figure of the subject within poststructuralist and feminist debates about resistance. The subject is seen alternately as an active agent who can use essentialism strategically and a discursive construction that can be easily manipulated by ideology. This study explores the ground between these two poles, mapping the ways in which essentialisms around motherhood can be proscriptive in the hands of hegemonies, but empowering when used by subjects themselves, who blend experience with essence. Interviews with participants in both

groups as well as testimonial accounts, films and media coverage of the groups combine to allow a rich exploration of essentialisms by the mothers and their states.

My first chapter explores how the *Madres* and the dictatorship used essentialism to struggle for discursive control over Argentine motherhood. The *Madres'* authorization of themselves as public, political subjects –in interviews, testimonies and letters-- challenged the dictatorship's formation of motherhood as a private, domestic identity. Chapter two examines the representation of the *Madres'* protests in film, exploring the ambivalence that Argentine audiences experienced in the women's blurring of several traditional binaries: emotion and reason, family and state, private and public.

My third and fourth chapters analyze the narrative strategies of Another Mother for Peace. These North American mothers used essentialism to justify their movement into the public, political sphere, while still performing traditional, domestic motherhood in strategic ways. My final section explores how distinct cultural, religious and historical paradigms inflected the experiences of these two mothers' groups differently, facilitating and/or problematizing their uses of essentialist identities. This analysis critiques the limitations of both proscriptive and biological essentialisms, and allows us to see how the mothers' own experiences of motherhood pushed them beyond the boundaries of traditional essentialism and into new subjectivities.

ESSENTIALLY POWERFUL: POLITICAL MOTHERHOOD IN THE UNITED
STATES AND ARGENTINA

By

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To my mother and father for their many gifts: intellectual curiosity, a love of reading, a penchant for writing, and boundless devotion to their children. All of these pieces have found a home in this work.

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Introduction

The achievement of a definitive or calculable subjectivity, even when it seems to offer agency, is clear when we realize that women become subjects only when they conform to specified and calculable representations of themselves as subjects.

-Diane Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction*

The degree to which people make themselves political subjects or are made into subjects by hegemonic forces is widely debated in feminist, poststructuralist and postcolonial theories. While many contemporary feminist thinkers argue that agency, the ability of individuals to “freely and autonomously initiate action” is vital to understanding the notion of the subject, poststructuralists contend that agency is an invention of those who do not adequately understand the production of subjectivity by ideology, discourse and language (Ashcroft et al. 8). Poststructuralists argue that the subject is a position, determined by discourse --unspoken rules within a culture about what can be said and what is prohibited, and ideology –a system of ideas put forth by the ruling class that legitimizes their dominance (Macey 198-199). Postcolonial and feminist critics are more ambivalent about the subject. While acknowledging the power of discourse and ideology to construct compliant subjects and the difficulty of escaping from these subjectivities, most feminist and postcolonial theorists believe that agency can resist these forces and allow people to construct themselves as independent subjects. They believe in the power of “autonomous human consciousness” as a “source of action and meaning rather than their product” (Ashcroft et al. 220). The basis for liberation in postcolonial and feminist models is that marginalized people –women and colonized peoples—can maintain subject positions that are outside of the structures imposed by hegemonic forces such as patriarchy and colonialism. At the same time, theorists

acknowledge that marginalized people --living under conditions of gendered, racial, economic oppression-- are vulnerable to accepting some of their oppressors' world views because they are so dominant in their cultural milieu. Louis Althusser calls this process interpellation. People become certain types of subjects because their societies (or governments or families) call them to inhabit certain subject positions that these groups produce. Althusser notes that this process can be violent --enacted through entities like the courts, the army or the prison system --repressive state apparatus; or less obvious -- through the schools, churches, clubs--ideological state apparatus. Whether violent or not, Althusser argues that the state is behind most of the subject positions that are produced, and into which people are led, often uncritically. People may think they have agency but this is only because the state has designed mechanisms that intentionally give them this perception, allowing them to act out their rebellious impulses in a controlled environment. As feminist scholar Diane Elam explains, "the subject does not enter into the realm of the political; rather, the subject is produced by the political itself as a way to calculate and control individuals" (70).

The case of the mother who undertakes political action against her state for the sake of her child is one that problematizes the positions of feminists, postcolonialists and poststructuralists. Her protest challenges the notion that the state constructs all subjectivities by enacting resistance that has baffled and/or paralyzed several contemporary states, among them the United States and Argentina. At the same time, the politicized mother problematizes feminist positions by promoting traditional, patriarchal versions of motherhood located within nationalist narratives. In the process such mothers often employ essentialist language and paradigms that have been traditionally limiting to

women, an apparent contradiction in their goals. Such dynamics call into question the possibility of real agency for women within patriarchal structures. To better understand these paradoxical trends my dissertation project looks at the experiences of two groups of mothers who undertook dramatic public protests against their own states. In the United States mothers organized a group called Another Mother for Peace (AMP) in 1967 to protest the drafting of their sons into the Vietnam War. In 1976 the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* (hereafter referred to as the *Madres*) began marching in Buenos Aires, Argentina to demand the return of their children who had been “disappeared” under a military dictatorship.¹ In both cases the women organized under the banner of motherhood, specifically highlighting their subject positions as mothers to justify their right to protest and challenging several binaries that had traditionally blocked their access to political power.

The mothers in both of these groups were initially motivated primarily by concern for their children. None of them had formal political training, political connections or other exceptional social advantages such as advanced education or wealth. They had only two strengths: their own devotion to their children and the recognition in their respective cultures of mothers as “special” subjects. In most societies mothers possess unique value that can be explained in different ways: by their traditional care of young children, their association with fertility and reproduction, their association with the private sphere and their connection with female deities or religious narratives. These

¹ The English term “disappeared” does not completely capture what the Spanish verb “desaparecer” has come to signify. The term in Spanish came about under the Argentine military dictatorship and its practice of kidnapping and killing civilians. The bodies of victims were frequently destroyed while officials publicly denied that they knew anything about their whereabouts, often claiming that the missing had gone abroad. The term is now widely used in Central and South America to describe this practice by other authoritarian regimes and paramilitary groups.

roots translate into cultural capital that is frequently described in spiritual or biological terms. In short, mothers are often portrayed in terms of the “essence” of motherhood. Common behaviors among mothers contribute to essentialist framings, especially by patriarchal forces. Healthy mothers demonstrate deep emotional attachments to their children. They often show great courage when their children face danger or deprivation. Many exhibit a willingness to sacrifice themselves for their children’s well being in dramatic, life-saving conditions. Most exhibit great patience in caring for and teaching young children. And many are strategic in advocating for their children, sometimes deferring to patriarchal authority if this furthers the security or development of their children. These patterns have contributed to essentialist notions of mothers as self-sacrificing, nurturing, emotional, and submissive.

Feminist theorist Diana Fuss explains “essence” as “that which is most irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing” (250). Feminists, poststructuralists and postcolonialists agree that powerful ideological and linguistic forces influence the way that we understand elements in our world. If people or groups of people are portrayed in terms of their “essential” characteristics then someone or something gets to decide what these characteristics are. This may be the state, the church, popular culture, or some combination of these. For groups with traditionally less power –women, the colonized, the poor, people of color—the ability of the state to define their essence and distribute representations based on this model is a powerful tool in controlling them. Understanding how the mothers in these two groups were able to resist this dynamic without dismissing essentialism completely is one of the objectives of this study. Another is to explore how the mothers’ groups challenged formal political

authority with grass roots power, by employing essentialism. Using Max Weber's definition of authority, "the abstract right to make a particular decision and to command obedience," I will explore how the mothers used essentialism to challenge state authority and to cultivate power that was not based hierarchy, reason, or violence (qtd. in Rosaldo 18-19). I will also employ Weber's definition of power as the "ability to effectively make or secure favorable decisions which are not, of right, allocated to the individuals or roles" (qtd. in Rosaldo 18-19). This understanding of power accurately describes the positions of influence that the mothers' groups came to occupy outside of the officially sanctioned systems of authority. I will demonstrate how the mothers used essentialist identities as mothers to enter this space and how they rejected these same essentialisms once inside.

My third goal is to map several of the forces that constituted "motherhood" in Argentina and the U.S. and to examine how they simultaneously limited and benefited the groups' activism. Michel Foucault has called this methodology a genealogy. He argues that studying the origins and developments of specific paradigms and how they are linked to discourse and ideology can help us understand how we are constituted as subjects. This lens allows us to see how certain types of essentialism around motherhood's function to proscribe behavior rather than to describe it. I will call this form of essentialism, most often practiced by nationalist or authoritarian regimes, "proscriptive essentialism."

In contrast to proscriptive essentialism I will posit the notion of "experiential essentialism." This approach rejects the notion that mothers are biologically or divinely designed in specific ways for projects much larger than themselves. But it does not wholly embrace the constructionist model, as many poststructuralists do, analyzing the

subject as entirely produced by “systems of representations, social and material practices, laws of discourses and ideological effects” (Fuss 251). Constructionism has two detrimental effects for political resistance: it significantly weakens theories of agency if subjects are created entirely by external forces; and it impedes their ability to form groups around a common identity, depriving subjects of “a platform from which to create political agendas or build coalitions” (233 Gaard). In other words there are reasons that essentialism, despite its history of misuse by hegemony, is a more viable basis than constructionism for political action.

My notion of “experiential” essentialism claims some middle ground that more accurately represents the phenomenon experienced by these two groups of politicized mothers. “Experiential” essentialism recognizes that certain experiences can produce profound transformations in the subject. Foucault has called this “subjectivation”: “the coming together with oneself... making the truth your own, becoming the subject of the enunciation of true discourse” (333 Foucault). While Foucault explains the internal process of a single subject undergoing transformation, he does not, as many feminist critics have noted, address how this process occurs in relationship to others or on the basis of emotion –two components that are central to these two groups’ experiences. The experience of mothering and, in these cases, of having lost a child and confronting the state over it, produced profound transformations in these women on several levels. Their testimonials about their losses, not just of their children, but of fundamental identity narratives –citizen, Catholic, wife, mother-- speak clearly to these dynamics. Both sets of women gathered together because their experiences as mothers created what we can only describe as an essence: something so fundamental to their existence that it changed

their ways of being in the world. Additionally, their identities as mothers served them well in making use of the social capital of motherhood. The *Madres*, for example, prohibited non-mothers from membership, in part for reasons of safety, but also because there were specific advantages that mothers enjoyed that were based in their identities as mothers: “había decidido evitar que fueran los jóvenes [a la Plaza de Mayo] así como también los hombres.... Estimamos más oportuno tomar como portaestandartes a mujeres de edad madura, *madres* de familias, con todo lo que eso representa en la tradición argentina” ‘it had been decided to avoid sending young people and men [to the Plaza].... We judged it better that the representatives be mature women, mothers of families, with all that that represents in the Argentine tradition’ (Cecilia qtd. in Bousquet 80).

The two groups’ production of testimonials was central to this process of transformation. Their use of first-person narratives, motivated by their desperation around their children’s safety, addressed several deeply personal topics that surfaced as a result of their protests: changes in familial gender roles, conflicts with their churches, and their ambivalence towards their own states. Telling their stories both required and produced agency, a critical component of subjectivity in feminist theory and the only way that marginalized people, in the view of poststructuralists, can step out of pre-determined subject positions. As testimonial theorist George Yúdice has described it, testimony is a “tacit means by which people engage in the process of self-constitution and survival“(46). The women’s recognition that their private experiences were significant for larger public narratives was an important challenge to the traditional private/public divide. As they stepped physically into the public sphere they do so discursively as well, exposing their private lives to public reading, and hoping to influence wider discourse

around their respective issues. The process also bonded the women to each other in ways that blurred the traditional divide between the individual and the collective and illuminated the tension between the bonds of the nuclear family and allegiance to the state.

Since my analysis is not just about the transformation of these individual women but about how their experiences changed the way we conceive of several binaries --the private and the public, the individual and the collective, the family and the state-- the majority of the texts I explore are testimonials in the larger sense of the term. Some are book-length texts while others are poems, interviews, and newspaper and magazine articles. Several are authored and produced by the mothers themselves while others are mediated by journalists or academics. I have also included films since a large body of films grew out of the Argentine *Madres*' experience, and several significant documentaries were produced around U.S. mothers during the Vietnam War. Another advantage to this variety of genres is that discourse around motherhood was constructed in multiple locations: by individual mothers' voices, by collective mothers' groups, by nationalist state propaganda, and by popular media. Examining this range of cultural artifacts paints a more complete picture of the process by which political motherhood evolved and came into conflict with other cultural paradigms. It also enables us to trace the genealogy of "political motherhood" through more expansive networks than those present in a single genre or perspective.

My first chapter explores the discourse of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* through testimonials and periodical accounts. I rely on interviews that I conducted in Argentina in 2005 with six of the *Madres* and articles and texts that I obtained at the archives of the

two contemporary branches of the *Madres*, La Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo: Línea Fundadora.² Through these narratives I explore how the *Madres* used traditional essentialist images to win favor in the eyes of patriarchal powers and to justify their transgression of the public/private divide. The chapter also examines how the group's political actions simultaneously renounced essentialism that limited mothers to the private sphere and drew on that same privacy—in the framing of motherhood—to authorize their protests. Gradually, the women grew into new subjectivities built on their relationships to other *Madres*, and their creation of what Guillermo O'Donnell has called “horizontal voice.” As they morphed into a collective subjectivity and together confronted the patriarchy of the Catholic Church and the state, a new type of essentialism emerged, what I will call “experiential essentialism.”

Chapter two examines the representation of the *Madres* through the lens of five films produced about the era of the dictatorship from 1985 to 2004. I explore five trends in the films that influence the degree to which essentialist identities are accepted, rejected or renegotiated: the *Madres*' challenge to patriarchy; the *Madres*' relationship to the public/private split; the ambivalence of Argentine audiences towards the *Madres*; the *Madres*' deconstruction of family as a tool of the state; and the birth of new subjectivities through solidarity with other *Madres*. Examining these five facets of each film expands my discussion of the role of essentialism in political subjectivity by placing it within the networks of power relations as constructed by religious, political and cultural paradigms. I also discuss how the lighting and camera angles impact the tendency of the film to

² The original group of Madres split into two in 1986 over several differences, among them: the exhumation of bodies, the payment of reparations to the families of *desaparecidos*, relations with the new democratic government and the role of memorials for the *desaparecidos*. While both groups are still active and outspoken in 2007, La Asociación is generally considered more radical.

construct the *Madres* and their protests unproblematically or to challenge them.

Additionally, I discuss the relation of each film to the legacy of New Latin American Cinema, looking specifically at how the content and form of each film attempt to capture the revolutionary political spirit of the earlier movement.

My third chapter introduces Another Mother for Peace (AMP) and analyzes their discourse through several genres: testimonials, newspaper accounts, and material printed by the group for distribution – pamphlets, mailings, and poetry. I gathered this material primarily from the archives of Another Mother for Peace, housed in the Peace Collection of Swarthmore College. I also interviewed one of the founding mothers of AMP, Gerta Katz, and a founding mother of Women Strike for Peace, Cora Weiss. This chapter examines the group’s use of essentialism through biological and emotional framings, as well as traditional, domestic motherhood, and their resistance to essentialism by challenging the subservience of the nuclear family to that of the state. I explore their tendency, much like the *Madres*, to use essentialist models of traditional motherhood to gain access to the public sphere and to justify their enactment of a distinct political subjectivity once inside that sphere. It also explores AMP within the legacy of the U.S. women’s moral reform movement, and in the context of the second wave of feminism, both of which problematized essentialist notions of women and mothers. The chapter also addresses the group’s discursive challenge to the reason/emotion binary and how it used images of traditional, domestic motherhood to bolster its authority. This section shows how the denaturalization of motherhood --using Sara Ruddick’s notion of “maternal thinking”—can serve to liberate mothers’ behavior from essentialist paradigms.

Chapter four is a narrative analysis of eight texts produced about the Vietnam War: two novels, two testimonials, and four documentaries. Some of this material I obtained from the “Imaginative Collections of the Vietnam War” at La Salle University, some from the Vietnam War Collection at Colorado State University, and some from the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Each piece contains a character or a real person who is a member of Another Mother for Peace or a mother-figure protesting the Vietnam War. As a group the texts highlight the primary conflicts that maternal protests have inspired: the tension between the interests of the state and those of the nuclear family; the blurring of the private and public spheres; the role of patriarchy in controlling mothers whose activities challenge the state’s hegemony; and the privileging of reason over emotion. Individually, the texts allow us to see how their very different forms provoke distinct types of dialogue around public political subjectivity and gender roles within the nuclear family.

My final chapter compares the two political mothers’ groups, highlighting the extent to which they encountered similar challenges: difficulty in presenting their “private” losses as public issues; limiting constructions of women as private subjects, essentially unequipped to participate in public discourse; the privileging of rational discourse and disrespect for emotional episteme; and the construction of the patriarchal nuclear family in service to the national one. I also explore the significant differences that the groups’ geopolitical circumstances created in their protests. Argentina’s rule by a violent military dictatorship forced the *Madres* to challenge the legal authority of their state, as well as the moral one. The suspension of the constitution in Argentina enabled the state to restrict the movement of citizens, their right to gather in groups, to publish

freely, and to submit *habeas corpus* on behalf of the disappeared ‘*los desaparecidos*.’ The U.S., on the other hand, remained a functioning democracy. Although some of AMP’s rhetoric challenged the legitimacy of the U.S. draft, the group enjoyed basic rights that were denied the *Madres* and *los desaparecidos* in Argentina. These differences affected the depth of betrayal that the Argentine *Madres* experienced on the part of the Catholic Church, as well as the state, and ultimately led to a more radical and permanent political movement than that of Another Mother for Peace.

My primary goal in this dissertation is to locate the praxis of these two groups at the crossroads of several theories about essentialism and its role in the production of moral authority and political power. Feminist theory is markedly ambivalent about the use of essentialism in defining woman or mother. It argues alternately that essentialism can be a powerful source of strength and identity for women/mothers (cultural feminists in the U.S. and liberation theologians in Argentina); that essentialism is always proscriptive and makes mothers vulnerable to cooption by patriarchal forces (Feijóo and Friedan); and that some middle ground in “strategic essentialism” can salvage essentialism for use in contemporary identity politics (Gayatri Spivak and Susan Stanford Friedman). Through my analysis of the experiences and discourses of these two mothers’ groups I will contribute two primary elements to this discussion. I will build on Sara Ruddick’s notion of “maternal thinking” --that mothers share common characteristics that are born of the *practice* of mothering— and argue that political mothers’ groups form around common experiences that disrupt a combination of their private and public roles as mothers. Some of these disruptions appear more “private,” the breaking emotional and physical bonds with their children, for example. These are often expressed in naturalist

language, even by mothers themselves, indicating the power of dominant discourse in the representation of experience. Other disruptions seem more “public” in character --either because of the origin of a paradigm or the location of the disruption: a disregard for the sanctity of the home, propaganda that privileged national narratives over familial ones, or disrespect for the sacred role of the mother within *machismo*. Disruptions such as those experienced by these two groups caused fundamental transformations in the way such mothers saw their worlds, their roles as private and public subjects and their identities as individual and collective subjects. A person without a subject position of “mother” could not have had the same experiences in part because they are not treated as mothers by others. Experiential essentialism depends in part on the way that subjects are recognized as qualifying for a certain identity category and are treated differently because of that label. “Experiential essentialism” rests on two components: the solidarity built on common experience, such as the *Madres*’ losses; and the experiences that subjects have when they are categorized as belonging to a certain identity group. The *Madres*, for example, were treated in specific ways by the dictatorship because they had been labeled (or they self-identified) as “mothers.” This category invoked a litany of meanings and expectations around motherhood, produced by cultural and religious paradigms. The real mothers had to interact with essentialist versions of how they were supposed to behave, to mourn, to question, etc. At the same time their solidarity with other mothers allowed them to remain grounded in their personal experiences at least somewhat distanced from these proscriptive framings. For the subjects themselves this form of essentialism does not rest on externals like biology or nature -- although mothers’ groups are frequently identified in these terms by outsiders, and even by their own members. At the same time,

it does not dismiss the influence of discourse and ideology in their experiences and understandings of motherhood. In the end it provides a space for collective political action by diverse people who happen to be called “mothers.” It is a strategic essentialism that doesn’t have to strategize.

Although this study of political motherhood is limited to two groups in the Americas, it has several implications for theory and practice around political subjectivity. It argues for the survival of the subject even in the context of discursive and ideological hegemony. The inability of these states, in particular Argentina with its violent repressive apparatus, to control the mothers’ creation of subjectivity in terms that they defined is evidence of this. It also speaks to the debates around the risks of essentialism in identity politics, showing two examples of groups that employed essentialism in ways that allowed them to draw on the social capital contained in their traditional identities, while constructing less limiting ones on the basis of shared experience. Their solidarity tolerated internal difference because it was based on experience, not biology, which has impeded other identity groups. The two groups’ reliance on emotional epistemology, in contrast to traditional reason-based, patriarchal politics, allowed them to position themselves as subjects in the traditional public sphere but circumvent many of its patriarchal discursive rules.

This project positions theories of essentialism at the crossroads of several disciplines: women’s studies, political science, philosophy and testimonial literature. In the tradition of women’s studies and philosophy I explore the question of whether women are “made, not born” (Simone de Beauvoir), as well as the construction of female subjects in distinct historical periods and geographic locations. Many of the forces that

shape subjectivity can be defined as “political” --related to the manipulations of power. I locate these two mothers’ groups within discourses that are frequently used in political science, examining conceptions of power, authority and subjectivity within the movements. I also look at tensions between the private and the public, and the family and the state – themes that are explored at length in political science. My analysis crosses into the realm of literature more specifically when it addresses testimonial accounts produced by the two groups. The production of subjectivity through narrative and the movement of mothers’ “private” voices into the “public” sphere are dynamics that can only be thoroughly examined with the tools of political science, philosophy, literature and women’s studies.

Similarly my primary sources cross multiple genres: archival material from both groups in the form of mailings, letters, poems and articles in popular presses; interviews with participants from both groups; documentary and fictional films; novels; and testimonials in several forms. This variety of sources provides a more complete picture of the multiple representations of motherhood that existed in each location and the diverse methods by which they circulated. When viewed through the interdisciplinary analysis I employ, these sources provide new insights about the workings of essentialism in political motherhood.

Chapter 1:

Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo: Essentialist Motherhood during the Argentine Dictatorship

Parecen no darse cuenta de lo que sufre una madre a la que la han arrebatado su hijo...la sola idea de que a consecuencia de nuestra acción pudiéramos obligarlos a liberar a nuestros queridos desaparecidos es un motor cuyo potencia ellos ni siquiera sospechan. Ni sus amenazas ni sus fusiles pueden contra la fe de una madre. Si ellos quieren obtener la paz no tienen otra solución que respondernos o matarnos

-- Rita, Madre de la Plaza de Mayo

They don't realize what a mother suffers whose child has been wrenched from her...just the idea that as a consequence of our action we could force them to free our disappeared loved ones is a drive whose strength they didn't even suspect. Neither their threats nor their guns were useful against the faith of a mother. If they want peace they have no other option but to answer us or kill us.

--Rita, Mother of the Plaza de Mayo

The devotion that the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* (the *Madres*) demonstrated in their quest to free their children was very dramatic. They began marching in public in 1977 in defiance of a ban on public gatherings, demonstrations or political opposition groups. They chose the most public place imaginable in Buenos Aires, the *Plaza de Mayo*, facing the president's office and surrounded by government buildings. Their only potential allies were to be found in the Cathedral on the square, but its doors would soon be barred to them.

This initial group of fourteen *Madres* organized out of desperation for their children's lives. The military coup of 1976 had brought to power a nationalist regime bent on eliminating "subversive" elements at any cost. As the governor of Buenos Aires, General Ibérico Saint Jean, described the plan: "Primero mataremos a los subversivos, luego a sus colaboradores, después a sus simpatizantes y luego a quienes permanezcan indiferentes; y

finalmente, mataremos a los tímidos" 'First we kill the subversives, then their collaborators, then their sympathizers, and then those who remain indifferent; and finally, we kill the timid' (Feitlowitz 32).

After years of political instability, terrorism and jockeying by political factions, large portions of the Argentine populace looked to the *junta* for stability and order. And they provided it, but at a heavy price. Thousands of people began to disappear, more than 76% of them between sixteen and thirty years old. (Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas 293).³ Because of the relatively young age of the disappeared, many had middle-aged mothers who began visiting jails, hospitals, and courts, unaware of the regime's policy of housing prisoners in over 300 secret detention centers, torturing them, and in eventually murdering them.⁴ What they did realize was that their inquiries were met with denials and rebuffs, and so they decided to march together: "Let's go to the Plaza de Mayo and when there's enough of us... we'll go together to the Government House and demand an answer'" (María del Rosario qtd. in Fisher 28).

The biggest challenge that the *Madres* faced was how to make themselves into subjects under a regime that had sought to destroy subjectivity. People had disappeared without a trace into the "noche y niebla" 'night and fog'⁵ (Feitlowitz 49). Traditional forms of subjectivity had been curtailed: the press was heavily censored, certain words were banned, specific topics, such as the appearance of bodies in the street or the mention of disappearances, were prohibited. Almost by accident, the *Madres* made themselves

³ Human rights groups regularly estimate that 30,000 people disappeared during the Argentine repression. While CONADEP, the official national study of the violence of the era, only confirmed the disappearance of 8,960 people, it admits the only *desaparecidos* counted were those whose family or friends came forward to report them missing. The Commission agreed that, given the violence, it is likely that many cases were never reported (*Nunca Más* 479).

⁴ 21% of the *desaparecidos* were students, according to *Nunca Más*.

⁵ Numerous historians have commented that the Argentine military's pattern of disappearing people was based on Hitler's model of "Nacht und Nebel."

into subjects through one of the only identities that survived the regime's violence: the tradition of Argentine motherhood. Informed by the Catholic practice of *marianismo* and the construction of mothers within *machismo*, the mother figure was linked to certain essential characteristics that limited her influence in the public sphere. But she also enjoyed a degree of respect and even reverence for her functions in the private sphere, which provided crucial protection to the *Madres* under the dictatorship. So the *Madres* stepped into these very traditional roles and began to challenge the way that the essential identity of the mother functioned in Argentina. At times they performed the traditional motherhood that the dictatorship proscribed in their propaganda and that was rooted in the paradigms of *marianismo* and *machismo*. At other times they deconstructed these models and defied them outright, trusting their experiences of mothering to guide their behavior. In the process they preserved their diversity and political agency by developing a new kind of essential identity –experiential essentialism-- based on their personal experiences and solidarity with other mothers. In all of these forms they complicated the notion of agency within a hegemonic structure and the ability of the subject to gain power both through, and in opposition to, essential identities. They also blurred the private/public divide, challenging the notion that a woman/mother is an inherently private subject whose essential nature precludes her from public politics. And they revealed the extent to which an episteme rooted in emotion, so often attributed to women in essentialist paradigms, was threatening to the Enlightenment model of the reason-based subject.

THEORY & TEXTS

This chapter explores the role of essentialism in the maternalist rhetoric and performances of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*. Through a variety of texts produced by and about the *Madres*, the chapter examines how the *Madres* used essentialist notions of Argentine motherhood to further their goals without being limited by them. My analysis will explore how the *Madres* simultaneously performed these traditional maternal identities and rebelled against them. Finally, it will examine how they gave birth to “experiential” essentialism, a term that blends the strengths of traditional essentialism with those of identity politics.

The texts I engage span a variety of genres: poetry, narrative testimonial, letters, articles and advertisements in periodicals. To examine the dictatorship’s responses to the *Madres’* campaign I will analyze propaganda produced by the regime in magazines and in interviews to see how the regime attempted to use essentialist notions of motherhood to limit the *Madres’* political power. Through the use of poetry, letters and testimonials, I will show how the *Madres* constructed their own map of motherhood that included traditional essentialism, direct challenges to such essentialism, and their own take on “strategic essentialism.”

My theoretical approach draws on the work of several thinkers, primarily Michel Foucault, Sara Ruddick, and Susan Stanford Friedman. Foucault’s attention to the roles of discourse in shaping ideology and the “subjectivation” of the solitary subject dialogue with several feminists theories of agency and collective identity. Ruddick’s theory of motherhood as a disciplinary practice is useful to deconstructing the practice of motherhood and denaturalizing it from its essentialist moorings. Friedman’s concept of

“strategic essentialism” as a compromise that rescues traditional essentialism from its limitations and allows identity groups to employ it selectively is a creative solution to the challenges of traditional essentialism. The *Madres* built on this essentialist middle ground in creating another space -- one of experiential essentialism.

METHODOLOGY

To examine the questions I pose around the use of essentialism by the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, I collected texts from the Library of Congress in Washington DC, and I traveled to Argentina in November of 2005. In Buenos Aires I found a wealth of material at the offices of the two *Madres’* groups, Madres de Plaza de Mayo: Línea Fundadora and La Asociación de Madres de Plaza de Mayo.⁶ The first office contains a wonderful archive of correspondence with the Catholic Church and military leaders from the era of the dictatorship. The second office has a rich library of material containing books and videos about the era, and copies of all the newspapers published by the *Madres*. At both locations I conducted interviews with several *Madres*, and with one *Madre* in her home. I also obtained narratives and newspaper articles from La Biblioteca Nacional located on the Plaza de Mayo, from the archives of the Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales, and from several used bookstores in Buenos Aires.

My approach to the narratives I gathered was to examine three primary processes around the *Madres’* activism: (1) the extent to which the dictatorship tried to limit the *Madres’* activism through essentialist identities that were rigid and proscriptive; (2) the extent to which the *Madres* used traditional essentialist notions of mothers to their own advantage; (3) and how the *Madres* developed a type of essentialism –and political

⁶ I will explain how the *Madres* came to be separated into two groups further in this dissertation.

subjectivity-- that was qualitatively different from that of the dictatorship: open to growth and transformation and based on the effect of experience on subjectivity.

HISTORY OF MARIANISMO and MACHISMO

The persona of the obedient, Catholic mother has been a powerful one in the historically Catholic country of Argentina. Founded by the Catholic Church, Argentina has been predominantly Catholic since its inception. Its relationship to the Church was one of patronage, in which the state had the power to appoint bishops, build cathedrals and authorize missions.⁷ In order to call upon the authority of this history, and the moral authority of the Church, the *Madres* made their Catholic identities a prominent part of their protests. They prayed in public, met in churches, and sought the counsel of Catholic clergy. They oriented themselves particularly towards the figure of *la Virgen María* ('the Virgin Mary'), who traditionally has been considered the embodiment of female virtue in Latin American Catholicism. Evelyn Steven's critical work on *marianismo* describes it as a cultural paradigm in which "women are semi-divine, morally superior to and spiritually stronger than men" (91). This power, according to Stevens, is rooted in women's life-giving abilities, which bring them closer to divinity and make them morally stronger than men. The cultural counterpart to *marianismo* is *machismo*, the male paradigm in which men are cast as rule-breakers, sexually potent, and dismissive towards women. Women who are not potential sexual partners, such as mothers and sisters, are the exception to this treatment. This model is also informed by the warrior culture in

⁷ Many of these practices continued into the twentieth century with the state appointing bishops until 1966. The second article of the Argentine Constitution requires that the president of the nation be a Catholic (Mignone 76).

which men are encouraged to be aggressive, dominant, and non-emotional (Ruth 57).⁸ The origins of *machismo* are hypothesized in several ways: behaviors brought by the *conquistadores* to the New World from European patriarchies, behaviors developed by Natives in response to the violence of European invaders, or practices rooted in the Aztec military culture (Chant and Craske 15). Scholars disagree on which of these theories is most salient but agree on the patterns of behaviors that are produced in cultures influenced by *machismo*.

Whatever its origin, the dynamic between *marianismo* and *machismo* has a two fold effect on women/mothers. While *marianismo* elevates women/mothers on a spiritual plane, it humbles them in their earthly lives. The life of *la Virgen María* is considered an ideal: her piety as a young woman, her humility in accepting God's decree that she would bear the child, Christ, her obedience to God as she raised Jesus from childhood. Her acceptance of God's will for her son --his crucifixion-- is among her most celebrated stances and the vision of her weeping at the foot of his cross is among the most common representations of Biblical images. In short, humility, obedience, piety, and mourning are all intimately associated with *la Virgen María* or the *mater dolorosa* ('mother of sorrows').⁹ In addition, self-sacrifice is also a central characteristic of *marianismo*, since "this spiritual strength engenders abnegation... No self-denial is too great for the Latin American woman, no limit can be divined for her vast store of patience with men of her world" (Stevens, 94-95). These qualities are, then, celebrated in women/mothers in cultures with such an orientation towards *marianismo*. One could argue that Stevens's

⁸ The warrior imperative is thought to have roots in the Old World cultures of Spain and Italy, with its concepts of honor and shame accompanying notions of what is properly masculine (Stevens 91).

⁹ Stevens argues that this archetype is also present in the goddess figures from the pre-Christian era who mourns for her son every winter until he is restored in the spring.

1973 analysis, which is cited almost universally in discussions of *marianismo*, is dated and insufficiently problematized. While her wording about “the Latin American woman” certainly sounds reductive, its value lies in mapping the terrain out of which gendered behaviors may evolve and specific cultural lenses through which they are interpreted, and at times, proscribed. While the realities of individual women’s lives in any culture vary greatly the influence of certain paradigms -- *marianismo* and *machismo* in this case—are important to understanding certain broader patterns in political and social life. Historian Linda Hall’s more contemporary 2004 work, *Mary, Mother and Warrior: The Virgin in Spain and the Americas* argues that Mary’s image still contains power in Argentina: “The vision of la Virgen María continued [in the era of the dictatorship] to have the same kinds of power in Argentina that it had in Reconquest Spain and in the Conquest of Mexico and the Andes... Her image is used and her sheltering presence invoked for political as well as spiritual projects by the powerful and the powerless” (241). As I discuss below, the discourse that the *Madres*, as well as the dictatorship, created around the issue of the disappearances, is evidence both of these paradigms in action. While the ideals of *marianismo* do not accurately describe the behaviors of any individual women in Latin America, the existence of the paradigm historically and culturally certainly informs underlying values about women and their behavior.

In addition, there is evidence from Argentine journalists and cultural commentators that the mother figure continues to occupy a special position of respect and affection in contemporary Argentine culture. A *Página 12* journalist, for example, criticizes Argentines who were silent during the dictatorship but then jumped on the *Madres*’ bandwagon with the arrival of democracy: “en una sociedad que es notoria por el culto a

la figura de 'la madre,' solo la relación más entrañable, más biológica, lograra hacerse valer? Por cierto, los únicos con derecho a sentir orgullo por el ejemplo brindado por las Madres son ellas mismas” ‘in a society that is well-known for its cult of the ‘mother’ figure, only the most intimate, the most biological, was the only one that mattered in the end? Certainly, the only ones with the right to feel pride for the shining example of the Madres are the women themselves’ (Neilson 1996).

When we trace back the tenets of *marianismo*, as Foucault would encourage, we see that it is grounded in an essentialist view of women that is based in Christian mythology.¹⁰ When combined with the cultural paradigm that elevates male authority, we get a hybrid in which male authority takes on a divine quality. While *marianismo* stresses obedience and humility in women/mothers, their actual submission is supposed to be to God, not to men. The dictatorship, as many historians have noted, made itself a divine authority and viewed itself as the God to whom women/mothers should submit. Thus, women/mothers were inserted into subject positions that required obedience, self-sacrifice, and humility, towards the dictatorship.

RISKS OF ESSENTIALISM for the MADRES

The most prominent weakness in the use of essentialism to ground “motherhood” is that it can be co-opted by conservative forces that end up placing mothers in roles that are limited, domestic, and submissive. They can argue that mothers are devoted and nurturing because some force of nature or divinity makes them that way. If such paradigms are produced by patriarchal authority, then motherhood can become a

¹⁰ Catholic readings of Eve and Mary view them as foils of each other. Eve brought temptation, sin, and disobedience on the world, and Mary brought life, love, reconciliation. (Hamington 136).

subject position in service to a larger, hegemonic narrative of conservative Christianity, Islam or nationalism. The dictatorship's program of Catholic nationalism made no attempts to hide this intention.

In a strange way the dictatorship's propaganda seemed to use constructionist strategies to "promote" an essentialist identity in mothers. To use Diana Fuss' words, "while the essentialist holds that the natural is repressed by the social, the constructionist holds that the natural is produced by the social" (251). So, while the regime's obvious efforts to guide mothers to specific subject positions seem constructionist, their view of the "natural" in human relations speaks to an essentialist orientation. In the presence of "corrupt" forces—in their view Marxism and other "subversive" ideologies—vulnerable people had to be guided to their proper "natural" subject positions. This dynamic supports Diana Fuss' assertion that "the possibility of any radical constructionism can only be built on the foundations of hidden essentialism"(Fuss, 13). Given their dominance over media and representation during the era, the dictatorship saw motherhood as a social identity that was easily manipulated to serve their political purposes, and the regime used it freely in newspaper articles, interviews and television advertisements. If we go beneath the surface, we can see that the dictatorship's motherhood paradigm was very much grounded in essentialist notions of women/mothers as taught by the Catholic Church. Women/mothers were fundamentally submissive beings, prone to emotion, weak, and spiritually inclined.

Several newspaper articles on motherhood reveal the dictatorship's approach to the problem of subversion in the population and the important role that mothers were

given in combating it. Using essentialist strategies – “the natural is repressed by the social” -- they reminded mothers of their proper nationalist roles: duty to her biological family and to the family of the nation. These images subtly evoked essentialist notions of mothers’ innate patience and nurturing skills serving special roles in their children’s protection. The dictatorship approached the project of the *Madres* as one of guiding their maternal devotion in directions that were compatible with their state projects. A good example of this is the “Carta abierta a las *Madres* de Argentina,” run in the women’s magazine, *Para Ti* on July 5, 1976 (reproduced in Blaustein and Zubieta 130). The copy acknowledges mothers’ important roles in their children’s lives, but swiftly interpellates them into roles that serve the state:

’las Madres tienen un papel fundamental que desempeñar. En este tiempo criminal que nos toca vivir, antes esta Guerra subversiva que amenaza destruirlo todo, uno de los objetivos claves del enemigo es su hijo, la mente de su hijo. Y son ustedes, las *Madres*, con más fuerza y efectividad que nadie, las podrán desbaratar esa estrategia si dedican más tiempo que nunca al cuidado de sus hijos’ ‘Mothers have a fundamental role to play. In this criminal time that we live in, in the face of this war of subversion that threatens to destroy everything, one of the key objectives of the enemy is your child, the mind of your child. And it is you, the mothers, who have the most force and effectivity of anyone, who can break down this strategy if you dedicate more time than ever to caring for your children.’

Clearly the “natural” mothering skills of domestic work and supervision of children made the mothers uniquely suited to this task. In a similar discursive move, a

letter from an unidentified mother to her “subversive child” was run in La Nación, September 24 of 1976, under the headline, “Atribulada mujer” (‘Grieving Mother’). The title itself immediately conjures the *mater dolorosa* and the paradigm of the devoted, prayerful mother that *la Virgen María* models. The letter is ostensibly a mother’s suffering at seeing her son drift away towards subversive elements, eventually joining them, and being killed in his terrorist activities. The letter is not signed but the author is identified as “una madre desesperada” (‘a desperate mother’) and it was originally published in *La Voz del Interior*, a paper in Córdoba under the headline “Carta de una madre desesperada” (‘Letter from a Desperate Mother’). The fact that it was republished in the much larger Buenos Aires paper *La Nación* suggests that it was a useful tool in catching the eye of concerned mothers in a time of great uncertainty -- only six months after the coup.¹¹ It is significant that the headline in *La Nación* and the letter itself highlights the emotions that a mother would feel around her son’s “subversive” activities: anxiety, desperation, grief. Various testimonials by the *Madres* themselves, suggest the opposite: they were proud of their children’s participation in movements for social justice but this letter casts such activities as hurtful to the larger society and particularly harmful to a mother. The emphasis on a mother’s grief in this letter taps into the cultural paradigm of *marianismo*, which associates women with devotion to children, prayer and grief. It implies that mothers are powerless to interrogate these larger political forces in which their children may be engaged. This is exactly the kind of motherhood that

¹¹ Although it is difficult to characterize the content of individual newspapers in the dictatorship era -- the extent to which they censored their content because of pressure from the dictatorship-- one analysis of such papers describes *La Nación* as a paper that defended the military government and did not openly question the costs of the violent strategies that it employed (*Decíamos Ayer* 37).

philosopher Sara Ruddick criticizes when she argues that mothers, in particular, have been constructed passively as, “ladies of sorrow, personal mourners and martyrs of the nation who weep over suffering they cannot change and for which they take no responsibility (“Rethinking Maternal Politics” 376).

The campaign to manipulate mothers became especially ugly in the case of Thelma Jara de Cabeza, the mother of a 17-year old disappeared boy. After traveling the world to call attention to her son’s plight --she spoke before the United Nations and traveled to Mexico and Rome to win support for her cause-- she was herself kidnapped and forced to falsify an interview with *Para Ti* in 1979. In the magazine copy she confesses that her plight was “all my own fault,” and that she had been manipulated by the *Montoneros* into posing as a *Madre* of a *desaparecido* in order to slander the Argentine military. Now that she has realized her error, she is speaking out for “the benefit of Argentine mothers maybe [the *Montoneros*] are doing the same to other mothers” (qtd. in Feitlowitz 47-8). This once confident, bold woman who risked her life for her son is reduced to apologizing for her “blindness....guilty conscience..... stupidity.” Constructed as an obedient Catholic mother, she is scripted to say that she prays “that there will be no more mothers driven to despair and no more children who go wrong” (Feitlowitz 48). The real story behind Jara de Cabeza’s mock interview only came to light through the trials in which she testified in 1985.¹²

The interview, which was run under a two page banner headline, “Mother of a Dead Subversive Speaks Out,” exemplifies the dictatorship’s attempt to construct mothers in a variety of ways, playing on certain essentialist notions of mothers as weak, emotional, apolitical, and submissive. Mothers who are not properly fortified by the

¹² For her testimony, see *El Diario del Juicio*, no. 10 June 30 and no. 25 Nov. 12, 1985.

guidance of the regime were naïve and easily swept up by guerrilla factions. They were depicted as irresponsible for not better supervising their children, duplicitous in “posing” as real Mothers, and unpatriotic, in betraying the Argentine nation from abroad. At the same time Jara de Cabeza’s real life grief --her son was killed while she was abroad lobbying for his release-- was exploited to show that women’s/mother’s tendency towards emotion made them especially vulnerable to manipulation. Jara de Cabeza “admits” in the staged interview that she was “a perfect instrument for the *Montoneros*” (qtd. in Feitlowitz 48). She was weak, emotional, naïve and betrayed her nation. The article implies, by extension, that readers should view other women who claim to be mothers of *desaparecidos* with equal suspicion.

That the dictatorship was aware of the special status of mothers in Argentine culture was clear from two of its strategies. First, it tried to appear sympathetic to them. General Videla, in his first public acknowledgement of the existence of *desaparecidos* makes note of the suffering of mothers with, “La desaparición de algunas personas es una consecuencia no deseada de esta Guerra. Comprendemos el dolor de aquella madre o esposa que ha perdido a su hijo o marido” ‘The disappearance of some people is an undesirable consequence of this war. We understand the pain of that mother or wife who has lost her son or her husband’ (*La Prensa* 1977). Videla goes on, however, to blame the *desaparecidos* for their own fates with explanations of how “se pasó clandestinamente a las filas de la subversion...al cambiarse el nombre y salir clandestinamente del país.” ‘he/she has secretly gone behind the lines of the subversion andchanging their names and leaving the country.’ In this move he completely dismisses the *Madres*’ claims that their children are missing and explains their disappearances away with

fantastical accounts. The timing of this statement is significant because it is just three days after three of the founding *Madres* were kidnapped and disappeared.

At the same time that the dictatorship sympathized with the *Madres* and blamed them in the same breath, it also tried to control any other sympathetic discourse produced around the group. The newspaper *Crónica*, for example, was punished in 1976 by a two-day suspension in publication for “mostrar el rostro de la madre de uno de los detenidos” ‘showing the face of the mother of one of the prisoners’ (Blaustein and Zubieta 126).

The dictatorship’s violence towards them, both discursive and physical, contradicts its claims to protecting an essentially sacred mother figure. The dictatorship slandered the *Madres* as “locas”, “malas Madres,” “ Madres de subversivos,” “malas argentinas” ‘Hysterics.... bad mothers..... mothers of subversives... bad Argentines’ (Bousquet 71). In a documentary that I will analyze in my second chapter, a General asserts that, “No se olviden que estas señoras están continuando las actividades subversivas de sus hijos. La posición que toman solo da énfasis en que ellas son tan subversivas que sus hijos" 'Don't forget that these ladies are continuing the subversive activities of their children. The position they take only goes to emphasize that they are as subversive as their children’ (Muñoz and Portillo, *Las Madres, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*). The dictatorship’s early frustrations with the *Madres* are clearly rooted in their inability to dominate the multiple meanings of motherhood that the women’s public protests circulated.

There are countless examples of how the *Madres* explicitly challenged the dictatorship for control over María’s image. In their early protests each of the *Madres*

wore a single nail attached to her jacket to display her identification with the mother of Jesus: “para recordar el sacrificio de Cristo, clavado en la cruz... Nosotras también tenemos nuestro Cristo, y revivimos el dolor de María” ‘to remember the sacrifice of Christ, nailed to the cross. We also have our Christ and we relive the pain of Mary’ (Bousquet 47). While critics might question the power of *marianismo* in modern Argentine society, theologian Virgil emphasizes that, “devotion to Mary is the most popular, persistent and original characteristic of Latin American Christianity” (qtd. in Hamington 16). Most of the *Madres* were Catholic and their conscious identification with *María* can be seen in both essentialist and constructionist terms.¹³ Looking at the genealogy of Mary, we can see her as a figure constructed by the writings of the New Testament, the commentary of biblical scholars, and folklore, which include numerous sightings of her throughout Latin America and a syncretic appropriation of her by indigenous practices (Irone, et al. in Hamington 16). On the essentialist side, however, Mary is the Mother of God. She is beyond representation or construction but embodies a sacred figure whose characteristics are to be imitated by faithful, Catholic women. The *Madres*’ insertion of themselves into the narrative of *María* and *Jesus Cristo* has powerful cultural significance, whether from an essentialist or constructionist perspective.

In another protest, the *Madres* inserted themselves into a group of students marching to the Cathedral from a *Marista* school (a high school named after *la Virgen María*):

¹³ This characterization is from Alicia Domont, a French nun who worked closely with the early *Madres* and was disappeared with three of them in 1977 (Bousquet).

“Cuando la policía nos vio nos empezó a seguir pero, como estábamos mezclados con los maristas, los maristas estaban tan asustados que no les salían ni las palabras. Cuando vimos que la policía, cuando nos arribábamos a la Plaza Moreno, nos empezó a rodear para aislarnos del grupo, empezamos a rezar. Y como le tienen tanto miedo a Dios, nos dejaron que rezáramos. Y rezábamos Padres Nuestros y Aves Marías y Rosarios, unos atrás otros, hasta que llegamos a la puerta de la Catedral. Y seguimos rezando con mucho fuerza en la puerta de la Catedral para poder entrar a la Catedral” ‘ When the police saw us and started to follow us, as we were mixed in with the Maristas, the Maristas were so frightened that they didn’t say a word. When we saw that the police ...were surrounding us in order to isolate us from the group, we started to pray. And as they had such fear of God, they let us pray. And we prayed Our Fathers and Hail Marys and Rosaries, one after the other, until we got to the door of the church. And we kept praying with gusto at the door of the Cathedral so that they would let us in.’ (*Historias de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, Asociación 19-20).

While it is difficult to discern whether the *Madres*’ use of public prayer was authentic or performative or both, there are times in which their discourse reveals a tongue-in-cheek attitude: that prayer allowed them to play to role of submissive, devoted Mary, and got them access to church space and public sympathy, while at the same time they were building bicarbonate bombs to use against the police.¹⁴ The testimony describing one particular demonstration in the Plaza de Luján paints the *Madres* as “gritar

¹⁴ The Madres only constructed these bombs to defend themselves against police violence. (*Historia*, 16)

y pedir –rezando por supuesto—por los desaparecidos” ’ shouting and pleading –praying, of course—for the disappeared people’ (*Historias 12*). These prayers were not accidental political weapons, but purposeful discursive strategies, attempting to subjectivate the listeners. Playing on the predominant Catholicism of most of the military and police, the *Madres* called upon them to fill the subject position of the moral Catholic:

A medida que nos identificaban y nos preguntaban quiénes éramos y nos mandaban a un lugar, decidimos rezar también en ese lugar. Pero rezábamos pidiendo para que no fueran tan asesinos los de esa comisaría; or sea que mientras tanto aprovechábamos el rezo para decirles asesinos y torturadores a los que teníamos ahí adentro. Y era una acción fuerte, muy fuerte, pero como era dentro del rezo, del Ave María y del Padre Nuestro, como hay tanto respeto, y los milicos se la pasan haciéndose la señal de la cruz cuando entran y salen de las comisarías, no podían decirnos nada, porque entre el Padre Nuestro y Ave María los acusábamos de asesinos (*Historia de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo 20*).

‘We decided to pray in that place [where they sent us] . But we prayed, asking that these military police not be the assassins of this station so, what we were doing was taking advantage of the prayer to call the ones in front of us assassins and torturers. And it was a very powerful strategy, very powerful, because inside of each prayer, the “Hail Mary” or the “Our Father”, as everyone respects these, the police officers would pass by making the sign of the cross when they entered and left the station. They couldn’t say

anything to us because in between the Our Father and the Hail Mary, we were accusing them of being assassins.’

The *Madres* even brought the performance of *marianismo* to the doors of the Vatican. In a 1978 letter to Pope John Paul VI, they imply a set of essential qualities associated with *María* as they cast themselves as obedient, humble Catholics and they reference Biblical narratives to show their piety:

’We are Christian mothers. We do not know if our children are alive, dead, buried or unburied. We do not have the consolation of seeing them if they are in prison, or praying at their tombs, if they are dead. But our small grandchildren have also disappeared: Herod has not come back to earth; consequently someone is hiding them, we do not know for what..... we beg of your Holiness to intercede to end this Calvary that we are living’ (*Botín de Guerra* qtd. in Arditti, 63).

In a later letter to the president of the Bishops council in 1980, the *Madres* implored the Vatican through an essentialist grounding in the Marianist *mater dolorosa*: “estas *Madres* doloridas, humildamente solicitan de su Santidad que interceda ante el Episcopado Argentino para que tome una actitud concordante con la suya” “these suffering mothers, humbly solicit your intercession on the part of the Argentine Episcopate to take an attitude [of concern, interest] similar to your own” (*Madres* 1980). In a letter four years later to the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Cardinal Juan Carlos Aramburu, the *Madres* are clearly indignant at the Church’s silence and point out the church’s hypocrisy with respect to the *desaparecidos*. They are always careful to link their identities to an essentialist motherhood that is, like Mary’s, self-sacrificing and devoted: “Las *Madres* de Plaza de Mayo podemos afirmar que hemos cumplido nuestro

deber de amor con nuestros hijos; Ud., en cambio, cuando sea llamado ante Dios, no podrá decir que ha cumplido con su misión” “The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo can affirm that we have fulfilled our duties of love to our children. You all, on the other hand, when you are called before God, won’t be able to say that you have completed your mission” (*Madres* 1984). Implicit in all of these communications is that, as mothers, these women have the authority to demand information about their children. This authority derives in part from the essentialist identities found in *marianismo* and *machismo*: mothers are singularly devoted to their children, spiritually superior to men, prayerful and self-sacrificing. There is much evidence from their testimonials that the *Madres* were aware of the ways in which the forces of *marianismo* and *machismo* have constructed mothers and women.

Their dramatic protests were, themselves, a form of discourse. The *Madres* didn’t let their audiences forget that they were *Catholic* mothers, often including vigils in churches and strategic use of ritualized Catholic prayer. The *Madres*’ strategy of grounding their discourse in essentialist Catholic identities shows the powerful influence of the Church on the military. It is not until later missives that the *Madres* will explicitly link their identities to a formal discourse of rights that develops in the democratic era. In a letter to the new president, Carlos Menem, they write in 1992 that: “Nosotras, como *Madres*, tenemos el derecho inalienable de reclamarle que la haga pública [nos informe de la condición de nuestros hijos].” “We, as mothers, have an inalienable right to insist that you do it publicly (tell us about our children's fates]’ (*Madres*). The tone of the *Madres* changes significantly in this letter. The confident claim of the *Madres* to citizenship rights is a contrast to the humble pleadings of the weeping, Catholic mothers

of earlier years.¹⁵ Either way, the *Madres*' identification with this sacred Mother could only serve to increase their authority in the eyes of practicing Catholics. This fact that was not lost on the dictatorship, which was heavily invested in a rhetoric of Catholic nationalism. The junta had no qualms about enlisting the values of the Catholic church which were cast in heavily essentialist terms: "Los integrantes de la Junta no dudan en apelar a todos los valores sostenidos y defendidos por la jerrarquía de la Iglesia Católica, la que, como dueña de esos valores, al apropiarselos en el tiempo, los fue revistiendo de ahistoricidad, atemporalidad, universalidad" "The members of the junta had no reservations in appealing to the values sustained and defended by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, which, as the owner of such values, taking advantage of the times, went about disguising them as ahistorical, timeless and universal" (Oría 63). The presentation of certain values as universal and ahistorical facilitates essentialist identities such as those that it promoted around motherhood. The regime went to great lengths in speeches and publications to identify its national mission with the moral authority of the Church. Just four months after the coup, the newspaper *La Nación* quoted a Monsignor Vitorio Bonamín as claiming that "La lucha antsubversiva es una lucha en defensa de la moral, de la dignidad del hombre; es definativamente una lucha en defensa de Dios" "The fight against the subversives is a fight for the defense of morality, for the dignity of man; it is definitely a fight in defense of God" (*La Nación*, May 1, 1976, qtd. in Oría 63-64). Additionally, the regime was alert to the *Madres*' use of María's images for their own purposes. One Monsegnior rebukes the *Madres* for not modeling themselves more closely on the *la Virgen María*: "I can't imagine the Virgin Mary yelling, protesting, and

¹⁵ This is especially notable in the documentary *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*, which I explore in chapter two.

planting seeds of hate when her son, our Lord, was torn from her hands” (Monsignor Quarracino qtd. in Taylor 196). While the dictatorship was tolerant of mothers who were mournful and quiet, as *María* is portrayed, they are obviously disturbed when the *Madres* step outside of this role.¹⁶

From the perspective of power, the essentialist grounding of *marianismo* is both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness for the *Madres*. The vagueness of essentialist authority makes it vulnerable to manipulation by those with control over religious and political discourse, as the dictatorship had. As Marian scholar Maurice Hamington argues that “Divine mystery requires that the faithful place their trust in the authority of the Church leadership. Mystery reinforces hierarchy and the alienation that comes from stratification” (*Hail Mary* 145-6). The dictatorship blended *marianismo* with the equally essentialist proscriptions of *machismo* to justify their divine dominance over the *Madres*. They tried to use this power to control the behavior of the *Madres*, whose protests threatened their sovereignty. They tried to shame, threaten and violently repress the *Madres* into proper behavior. But the *Madres* saw through the junta’s attempts at what Foucault would call “subjection,” claiming themselves as subjects and using *María*’s cultural capital as a tool for their own “subjectivation.” As Diana Taylor so eloquently put it, “There is no woman behind the maternal image invoked by the military.... The maternal is merely a reflection of the masculinist version of maternity – patriarchy in drag” (77).

¹⁶ Numerous reports from surviving *desaparecidos* describe an even more horrific use of Mary’s image by the dictatorship. According to Amnesty international reports from 1980, and from survivors of detention centers, many of them were tortured in front of an image of the Virgin Mary. (Ximena Bunster-Burotto 299, taken from Amnesty International report)

Despite these testimonies there are still *Madres* who appear to remain within the Marianist construction of motherhood that the Church promoted. One even prays a rosary, asking *la Virgen María*, in her role as a mother, to protect her missing son on his birthday: “Rezaré un rosario y pediré a la Virgen como ‘Ella’ fue madre, me comprenda a mí; le dire orgullosa que mi hijo es bueno, y juntas te diremos: Que los cumplas feliz” ‘I will pray a rosary and ask the Virgin, as She is was a mother, that she understand me: I will say proudly that my son is good and together we will say: Have a happy birthday’ (Nelma in *Cantos* 23). It is notable here that this *Madre* feels so close to *la Virgen* that she creates a scene in which they are both caring for her son, in the same way that the *Madre* cares for *la Virgen*’s son (Jesus). Sandra Messinger Cypess notes that scenes such as this suggest that the *Madres* may have rejected the Fathers of the Church but not *la Virgen*.

Such invocations may be strategic attempts to win the hearts of more traditional Catholic readers, or they could be a re-reading of *María* as a figure of resistance who fights for the missing son. Whichever the case, the essentialism of *la Virgen* is certainly present in this passage: either authorizing the humble petition of this *Madre* for her son, or justifying the *Madres*’ unexpressed rebellion against her son’s imprisonment.

Some feminist analyses of the *Madres* have criticized them for playing into essentialist notions of Catholic women as weak, self-sacrificing and made only to serve their families. In certain instances the *Madres* did promote this: they made obsequious appeals to the *junta*, the military and the church, emphasizing their status as simple, non-political women, whose devotion to their children allowed them no identity apart from them. Their appeals for help were often cast in terms of their identities as helpless

women, appealing simultaneously to the cultural tradition of *machismo* and the image of the sacred mother: “No tiene vergüenza de atacar a *Madres* indefensas?” ‘Aren’t you ashamed of attacking defenseless mothers?’ (Bousquet 48). Above all the women stressed that they had no designs on political power, reinforcing the *machismo* image of women as belonging to the private sphere: “como lo hemos declarado reiteradamente –nuestros móviles son transparentes, detrás de nuestro accionar solo está el amor a nuestros hijos y no abrigamos propósitos mezquinos o de política menuda” ‘As we have said repeatedly, our motives are transparent, behind our actions is only the love for our children, and we do not harbor any political aims or petty intentions’ (Archives, Línea Fundadora, letter to the Junta, 1981). The *Madres* even played on their age and the matronly respect that comes with it. They would not, for example, allow sympathetic young women to march with them, for reasons of safety but also strategy. They insisted that they would have more luck with “mujeres de edad madura, *Madres* de familia, con todo lo que eso representa en la tradición argentina” ‘women of mature ages, mothers of families, with everything that that represents in the Argentine tradition’ (Bousquet 80).

All of these components point towards the reification of women in essentialist terms: life-givers, full of love and purity, self-sacrificing, and domestic, a strategy that I will show in my third chapter was used successfully by a U.S.-based mothers group to oppose the Vietnam War (see my third chapter). Several feminist scholars like Maria del Carmen Feijoó, have questioned the wisdom of this strategy, however. Feijoó warns that out of the *Madres*’ activities, “a new *marianismo* has arisen that could stimulate greater isolation” (Feijoó 121). Feijoó argues that the success of the *Madres*, “brought us back, unexpectedly, to the traditional worship of the Mary-mother characteristics of the most

conservative sectors of Argentine society” (121). Many middle class Argentine feminist groups, whose aims have been to separate themselves from the domestic realm, concur (Bouvard 190). But Feijóo’s analysis does not take into account the context of the *Madres*’ struggles, or the ways in which the *Madres* consciously appropriated these essentialist images of women/mothers in order to advance a larger agenda: the return of their children. The actions that the *Madres* took to expose and condemn the regime’s human rights violations publicly could not have grown out of women who sincerely accepted patriarchal, *machisto* notions of obedience and domesticity. Feijóo’s assumption that the *Madres*’ use of stereotypical, domestic imagery promoted a return to conservative *marianismo* is erroneous on two levels. First, the *Madres* worked under severe constraints that banned public gatherings and political activity, and censored publications so they could not freely choose their discursive tools. Second, it underestimates the *Madres*’ sophisticated balance of essentialism, which they realized granted them authority, and constructionism, which allowed them to influence the lenses through which their actions were read.

Evidence of this distinction can be seen in the *Madres*’ testimonial voices. When we combine the *Madres*’ public discourse with their more private testimonials, we hear them narrate their awakenings to gender consciousness. In many interviews they are intensely aware of the ways in which the construction of gender influenced their lives as young women, keeping them less educated, closer to home and ignorant about politics: “When I grew up it wasn’t considered decent for a woman to go into a bar or a restaurant alone. I couldn’t do it at first, I’d rather have starved” (Rita de Ponce qtd. in Fisher 57). “We were a lot of girls in the house. We never talked about politics or anything like

that ... I never went out to work, I was never anything more than a housewife and a mother ... “ (Carmen de Guede qtd. in Fisher 42). “But this was the time of Perón when people were out on the streets fighting. I was conscious of this, but in my house they stopped me getting involved because they thought that a girl shouldn’t be doing that sort of thing. How could a woman run in the streets with the mounted police hitting you across the back? ” (Elsa de Landin qtd. in Fisher 49). Even those women who would become leaders in the *Madres’* movement –Bonafini and Cortiñas, two women with particularly strong personalities—were affected by gender construction. Bonafini, current president of *La Asociación de Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, admits that her husband’s *machismo* once kept her from getting more education: “I wanted to get my secondary education when the children started secondary school but my husband didn’t want me to. He was very *machista* and old-fashioned in his ideas...” (qtd. in Fisher 48). Cortiñas, now leader of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo – Línea Fundadora*, admits that she herself continued the tradition of women’s submissiveness in her own family: “A mis hijos los crié además imbuida del machismo que había recibido. Mi papá, mi marido, el hogar patriarcal... Ay, pensar cómo cambió todo después! “ ‘I raised my kids imbued with the *machismo* that I had received. The father, the husband, the patriarchal home...Oh! To think how everything changed afterwards!’ (*Página 12*, March 24, 1996). Although these commentaries may have been prompted by editors who asked them to reflect on specific circumstances, there is no doubt that the *Madres* developed an awareness of the ways in which they were constructed as women and mothers by their culture.

Feijoó also sees a danger in the emotional discourse of the *Madres*, who took no pains to hide their grief and angst at their disappeared children. As one *Madre* put it, “Es un dolor tan profundo, ...tan llorado...a veces a gritos, sin control, rayando en la locura” ‘It is such a deep pain, ... so many tears shed ... sometimes I scream out of control, bordering on madness’ (Uranga de Almeida qtd. in Mellibovsky 20). This emotional charge eventually became a valuable source of power for them.¹⁷ Feijoó worries, however, that using emotional reactions is a dangerous strategy for women’s groups, as it is a slippery slope back to essentialization. She argues that “ linking the feminization of change to feminine emotionality constitutes a paradoxically vicious cycle” (121). Her point can be seen in the dictatorship’s attempts to label the *Madres* as *locas* (hysterics), drawing on ancient notions of women as over-emotional.¹⁸ The dyad of *machismo* and *marianismo* also constructs women as essentially emotional, and juxtaposes female emotionality to “male” reason and rationality (Stevens) The regime drew on these images of women--both essentialist and constructed-- to dismiss their protests with, “No nos preocupan. Son locas.” ‘We’re not worried about them. They are just crazy women.’ (Bousquet 57).

While Feijoó’s concerns about women’s groups using emotion in political protests may seem theoretically sound, she neglects the larger context of the *Madres*’ calculated, persistent activism, which clearly required powerful forces of reason and logic. They filed for writs of *habeus corpus*, contacted foreign embassies and media, traveled abroad

¹⁷ For more on the role of emotion in protest, see James Jasper’s “The Emotions of Protest” in *The Social Movements Reader*.

¹⁸ The term “hystera”, for example, comes from the Greek for “uterus”, and is the root of “hysterical” or “loca” in Spanish: a psychiatric condition characterized by excitability, anxiety; any outbreak of wild, uncontrollable feeling” (Webster’s Dictionary). The term is generally used to describe women, and is linked in the western hemisphere to Freudian theory in which neuroses were caused by disorders of the uterus.

to publicize their cases and raise money, and even launched their own newspaper. Such elements should work against the essentialization of women as domestic, passive, and obedient. Although the *Madres* may have employed these essentialist images of women at times, the sophistication with which they did this belies an intentionality that could not have been called hysterical.¹⁹

In other parts of Latin America, particularly those heavily influenced by liberation theology, the political activism of women, when paired with precepts of traditional *marianismo*, has been heralded as a reinscription of *la Virgen María* as a model for political action. As Nicaraguan activist “Sister Martha” describes, the women’s movement against violence in her country, “ ‘Mary isn’t the sugar, sweet, stupid woman reactionary Christians make her out to be ... Today Nicaraguan women hold Mary the Mother of God as their first model for promoting revolution. She, too, carried to the world a message of Revolution’ ” (Bunster Burotto cited in Nash and Safa 319). The suggestion that Catholic women could potentially read *la Virgen María* differently because of their own human experiences, lends support to my notion of essentialism informed by experience. This re-creation of *María* as a figure who embodies the true needs and concerns of Catholic women is an example of what Foucault would call “subjectivation” or “making the truth your own, becoming the subject of enunciation of true discourse” (*Hermeneutics* 333). This interpretation of *María* is in stark contrast to traditional Catholic teachings that construct *María* as an unchanging, rigid figure, whose

¹⁹ Some of their audience, however, may have been unaware of this dynamic and more easily interpellated into essentialist framings. It is difficult to get a clear sense of audiences’ direct responses to the *Madres* but at least one author has suggested that Argentine civilians were probably relatively savvy at identifying the slippage between essentialisms and the rhetorical strategies of the dictatorship, which aimed to construct specific subject positions (For more on this see Guillermo O’Donnell and Diana Taylor).

essence is narrowly defined strictly by patriarchal scripture. I have found no evidence that the figure of *la Virgen María* was specifically used in such a revolutionary way in Argentina but the *Madres*, themselves, manifested profound changes in their subject positions as they rebuilt their identities on the wreckage of their old selves. As noted earlier, this “subjectivation” grew largely out of the women’s willingness to accept some brutal truths about their children’s fates and the roles that the Church and the state played in their disappearances.

While their testimonies and poetry document many of their internal transformations, an important part of the *Madres*’ movement has been their public protests. Through these we can examine the public discourse that they constructed around motherhood by looking at the way they “performed” this role in public. Historians, sociologists, and journalists have all described these protests in some detail, so we can draw on multiple disciplines for descriptions. In addition, newspapers and magazines from the era of the dictatorship and the democratic era provide us with snapshots of how the *Madres* themselves and their oppositions, tried to use essentialisms to construct specific notions of proper Argentine motherhood.

STRENGTHS OF ESSENTIALISM for the MADRES

Despite the risks discussed above, essentialism held many strengths for the *Madres*. They used it to establish their authority to speak in public, to create a collective political identity and a communal voice, and finally, to claim the legacy of their children’s political activism as their own. Their maternal portraits called on three primary components of essentialized motherhood: biology, emotion, and spirituality. The *Madres*

used their biological connections to their children to evoke the private sphere and the authority that mothers are traditionally granted in that realm. They used their emotional experiences to conjure their devotion and self-sacrifice as mothers, which would also allow them to claim that they were fundamentally “different” political subjects. And their narrations of their supernatural connections to their children framed them within the traditional prayerful, spiritually oriented *Virgen María*, and allowed them to “inherit” their children’s political agendas.

One of the most obvious strengths of identifying motherhood in essentialist terms is that it crosses other categories such as race, class, religion, and nationality. Gathering under one common identity marker –with its associated essentialist qualities-- also facilitates the creation of a collective subjectivity among people who may be racially, socially and religiously diverse. The *Madres* argued that they bonded together out of their instinctive love for their children. They functioned well as a political group because they were of similar “essence” – gentle, caring, self-sacrificing, prayful. These characterizations of the *Madres* also helped them to create a communal voice –often through testimonials.

Numerous trends in these writings published by the *Madres* themselves – primarily poetry and short essays-- highlight some of the essentialisms around motherhood: women’s biological connections to their children, their self-sacrifice, their extreme devotion to their children, and the purity of their love. Often these traits are cast in naturalist terms, somehow growing out the physical bond of pregnancy, breast-feeding, and child- rearing. Whether the *Madres* purposefully use these motifs to authorize themselves as political actors or adopted some of them unconsciously from their cultural

milieu is impossible to say. On the other hand, the emotion in these verses is undeniably raw and certainly appears authentic. This emotion is linked to several phenomena which have given the *Madres* unrivaled political power: the continuing presence of the children in their daily lives, the inheritance of the *desaparecidos*' political legacy and the *Madres*' refusal to acknowledge the children's deaths. In the analysis below I will examine how this leap from traditional essentialism to expansive political power has been made, and has gone relatively unremarked upon from a theoretical perspective.

The first pattern is a marked tendency in the *Madres*' poetry to represent tangible scenes in the infancy or childhood of the *desaparecido*. Such visions easily conjure essentialist notions about mothers, as they portray the vulnerability that comes with such tender years, and the nurturing and devotion required to tend to young children. These images parallel many of those that make up essentialist framings of motherhood: mothers are loving, nurturing, tender, and self-effacing. One *Madre* clings to these memories, arguing with her son's captors that: "No podrán ellos sacarme la dulzura, de haberte dado la vida y el amor materno, no me podrán robar jamás las horas felices, de tu dorada infancia llena de esperanzas. No podrán ellos arrebatarme lo que tú me diste: tu primer diente, el paso vacilante, el sarampión aquél, tu primera palabra o tu risa cristalina y pura...." "They [the oppressors] cannot take from me the sweetness of having given you life and maternal love, they can never rob me of the happy hours of your gilded childhood, full of hopes. They can never seize what you gave me: your first tooth, your wobbly step, that case of measles, your first word or your laugh, crystal and pure..." (Celina Z. de Kofman in *El corazón*, 1997).

Even more dramatic are descriptions of phantom pregnancies, a common motif in the *Madres*' rhetoric: "Siento mi cuerpo cuajado de semillas, aunque mi matriz esté vacía. Por ese hijo que me han robado, siento vital la sangre mía" 'I feel my body clotted with seeds although my womb is empty. For this son that they have robbed me of, I feel my blood alive' (Virginia in *El corazón* 30) Scenes of mothers caring for young children or reflecting on the physical experience of pregnancy easily conjure up essentialist notions of motherhood that are frequently cast in naturalist terms.

In a related move, the *Madres* also speak of the absence of their children in very tactile terms, as if they are still physically connected to their children: "Hija de mis entrañas, si pudiera mirarte, besarte, darte al hijo que sueñas" 'Daughter of my heart, if I could just see you, give you the child that you dream of...' (Aurora in *El corazón* 42). "...al no poder abrazarte, Jaime adorado, pedazo de mis entrañas" 'not being able to embrace you, my adored Jaime, piece of my heart...' (Oro in *Cantos* 33). They also frequently speak of the continuing presence of their children –their sense that the *desaparecidos* are still present in their mothers' worlds: "Quiero contarte hijo mío, cómo te sentí a mi lado, esas veinticuatro horas, que las *Madres* velamos. Estabas a mi lado, me pareció que habíamos caminado juntos...estas siempre a mi lado" 'I want to tell you, my son, how I felt you at my side these 24 hours that the *Madres* sat up. You were at my side, it seemed to me that we had walked together...you are always at my side' (Loreface de Aggio in *Cantos* 34-5). This very real presence is linked to the intimacy of the mother-child bond, frequently emphasized in essentialist framings.

While it is possible that the *Madres* who contributed to these poems were coached about the structure of their narratives, their accounts certainly would have lacked

something had they not included references to their unique roles as mothers. Their experiences of pregnancy, breastfeeding, details of domestic life –which are common in the *Madres'* book-length testimonials-- are ones that fathers could not have had. This gives the *Madres* some unique power. They played a role that no one else could have played –essentially because of their biology. Biology allowed them to give life and to be identified as “women” and “mothers,” which determined their specific gender roles in their society.²⁰ So, really it is impossible to escape from essentialism, which may be a partial explanation for its presence in the *Madres'* narratives.

The strength of the *Madres'* love and devotion to their children is another pattern that conjures up essentialist framings within the Argentine context. The *Madres'* very simple descriptions of the feats they accomplished for their children call up images of the self-sacrificing, semi-sacred ideal of Argentine motherhood: “el amor por los hijos nos llevaba a desafiar todo el aparato represivo” ‘love for our children made us defy their whole repressive state apparatus’ (Maroni in Mellibovsky 96). “Pero nada nos detenía, nada nos paralizaba, nuestra seguridad no tenía importancia” ‘Nothing could stop us, nothing could paralyze us. Our safety wasn’t important’ (Brener de Bendersky qtd. in Mellibovsky 93). Other *Madres*, like Adelaida de Campopiano o Pirucha, cast their devotion in terms that encompass their entire existences: “en la búsqueda por la verdad... solo me detendrá la muerte” ‘in the search for the truth...only death will deter me’ (Yapur, April 30, 1998). Yet another *Madre* offered her own life for that of her son’s: “No puedo olvidarme cuando en los primeros años de la dictadura ofrecí mi vida por la libertad de Julio César” ‘I can’t forget when, in the first years of the dictatorship, I

²⁰ This recalls Simone de Beauvoir’s assertion that “One is not born, but becomes a woman” (*The Second Sex*).

offered my life for my son's freedom (Adelaida de Campopiano o Pirucha qtd. in Yapur, April 30, 1998). Although these narrations were no doubt sincere, such descriptions also play into traditional essentialisms by conjuring up images of the self-effacing, prayerful, nurturing mother.

Another trend that I observe in the *Madres'* narratives is a supernatural quality to their connections with their children, even in the children's physical absence. "En mis momentos de mucha soledad, imagino que Gra me sopló al oído este libro..." "During my loneliest moments I imagine that Gra [my missing daughter] blew the contents of this book into my ear..." (Mellibovsky 251). This very intimate gesture allows Mellibovsky's missing daughter to speak through her, but also seems to provide some solace in her absence. Several of the *Madres'* poems explore the legacy of their children's activism more explicitly, tying them to specific struggles against poverty or oppression. In this way the *Madres* become channels for the *desaparecidos*, which will later enable them to take on their political legacies. One *Madre* explains how she is reminded of her disappeared son's activism whenever she witnesses hunger or suffering: "Te veo en el niño que pasa descalzo...que gime de frío, de tristeza y de hambre" "I see you in the barefooted boy ...who wails in the cold from sadness and hunger" (*Cantos* 54-55). In her reaction to such scenes, this *Madre's* son remains present in her life in a very immediate way, through the political concerns that concerned him in life. Some *Madres* go further and relate the wider political vision of their children for the nation: "Brindabas ayuda a cuantos podías...sólo buscabas que en nuestra Argentina, jamás faltara, en un hogar humilde un pedazo de pan" "You offered help whenever you could...you only sought that in Argentina a humble home would never want for a piece

of bread' (Vda. De Suárez in *Cantos* 40). This narration both connects the *Madre* to her child with the memory of his generosity and reclaims a space for him in the narration of the nation through the legacy of his vision. The fact that this *Madre* specifies that her child's vision was for a better Argentine nation is a rhetorically sophisticated turn. In one sentence she reminds her audience of the idealism and generosity of the *desaparecidos* towards the most vulnerable, the poor-- rejecting the charges that they were "subversivos"; she also reminds audiences that the *desaparecidos* were oriented towards the nation – refuting the charges that they were Marxists with allegiances outside of Argentina; and she conjures up the image of the home, a smaller model of the state, placing herself and her child within proper nationalist paradigms. Such descriptions of their children's activism and idealism are common in the *Madres*' testimonials. Clearly the *Madres* establish that their links to their children are intense: many still talk to them daily and most narrate their presences in their daily lives. Their advocacy for social justice issues with which some of their children were actively involved accomplishes two things: it authorizes the *Madres* further because of their intimate knowledge of their children's activities, described in detail in several testimonies; and it allows the *Madres* to justify their own participation in social justice campaigns by tracing them to their children's legacies.

A related trend in this poetry is the use of imagery of birth and rebirth. While manifest in several ways in different poems, the association of mothers with life and creation is a theme with remarkable presence in these works. Mothers are nurturing, loving, devoted to their children. These qualities bring them so close to their children that they are linked to them even in their physical absences. In some interviews this imagery

seeps into the *Madres'* discourse, like this *Página 12* interview with Natalia Paleo “Nuestros hijos son la semilla que renueva la fuerza para luchar por un mundo más digno....Esa semilla es la vida” ‘Our children are the seeds that rejuvenate our strength to work for a more dignified world...that seed is life’ (Chaina October 21, 2001).

The themes of birth and rebirth are present in dozens of *Madres'* reports. Hebe de Bonafini has put it most eloquently perhaps, describing herself as feeling “permanently pregnant” in the absence of her two missing children. “I always feel my children inside of me... This gives me much strength and makes me feel that my life is being used for the gestation of a new person” (qtd. in Bouvard 183). Another *Madre* explains that, “I always say that I didn’t give birth to my children, they gave birth to me because it was Martín who really taught me to love people” (Elisa de Landin in Fisher 49). Other mothers have used different imagery but with the same result. As Mellibovsky puts it: “esa mujer que sufría, reía, tenía miedo y luego se superaba, esa muchacha que no pudo dejarme entre los manos ni su propia imagen en un hijo, esa mujer que sin saberlo, me dió nueva vida, arrancando de mí una personalidad que desconocía” (49) ‘that girl [my daughter] who could not leave in my arms her own image in the form of a child, that woman who unknowingly gave me new life, wrenching me out of a personality of which I was unaware of’ (Mellibovsky 30). In some narratives their new subjectivity is portrayed as an issue of personal growth and awareness. “I didn’t understand anything [about social problems or politics] and didn’t try to understand, when they disappeared I had to learn a lot of things very quickly” (Carmen de Guede qtd. in Fisher 42). In others it is explicitly political: “Seguiremos firmes luchando por las ideas de nuestros hijos, que

desde hace mucho tiempo son las nuestras“ ‘We will keep firm fighting for the ideas of our children which for quite a while now are our ideas’ (Bonafini qtd.in Soriano, 1995).

The link between essentialist formations of motherhood and the radical politics that many of the *Madres* now embrace is often obscured by the different locations in which these discourses take place. It is in their testimonials that many of the essentialist framings can be found. This probably occurs because such narrations are generally done in private, with friendly audiences, towards whom the *Madres* feel comfortable speaking about their intimate feelings.²¹ Their radical political statements generally come out in speeches or marches, and occasionally in interviews preceding a public event. On rare occasions, however, these discourses are connected explicitly and we can see how the *Madres* rely on essentialist framings (mothers are life, love, devotion) to authorize their radical, political voices. As Bonafini puts it: “Nuestro camino de infinito amor a nuestros hijos, nos hizo revolucionarios” ‘Our road of infinite love for our children turned us into revolutionaries’ (*Página 12*, Sept. 6, 2002). Bonafini explicitly links the politics of the *Madres* to their quest for justice for their missing children: “ ‘Yo voy a sentir que la sangre de mis hijos está vengada cuando este pueblo tenga trabajo, salud, educación y un destino digno’ ” ‘I will feel that the blood of my children has been avenged when the country has work, health, education, and a dignified future’ (Bonafini in Soriano 1995). Bonafini’s tendency to narrate social injustice and reform in terms of the nation is a rhetorical pattern with several implications. It positions the activism of the *desaparecidos* on a national scale –reclaiming their legitimate identities as Argentines, slandered by the dictatorship’s propaganda during the repression. And it positions the *Madres* themselves

²¹ All of the testimonies I have reviewed here were edited by a *Madre* herself or sympathetic journalists or academics.

as advocates for the nation –rescuing them from charges of disloyalty, even into the democratic era. Another interesting note here is how Bonafini controls her own subjectivity. Even though she knows that her children will not return physically –a reality that she will not admit in public rhetoric, in private she creates terms in which she can be fulfilled existentially.

A remarkable element of the rebirth narrative is the component of spiritual evolution. In their capacity as mothers, many *Madres* replace the painful emotions they have endured in their losses with love, nurturing, forgiveness (also essentialist qualities in mothers). In so doing they symbolically give birth to a new world –more like the one their children envisioned. In another inspirational poem one of the *Madres* pointedly refuses to stoop to the level of her child’s murderers with,

“No quiero tu dolor, señor general, el dolor purifica el corazón, lo hace volar por la ventana, como voló el corazón de mi hijo. Quiero el amor que crea amor, quiero el deseo que provoca deseos, quiero la vida que crea vida, quiero que las Madres no den a luz, niños innocents y pacíficos, que después se convierten en tiranos, torturadores, y generales como vos, señor general” ‘ I don’t want your pain, Mr. General, that pain that purifies the heart and makes it fly out the window as the heart of my son did. I want love that creates love, I want desire that begets desire, I want life that creates life, I want mothers who don’t give birth to, innocent and peaceful children, who afterwards become tyrants, torturers, and generals like you, Mr. General’ (Maraini, *Cantos* 19-20).

Determining the mindset of the *Madres* when they wrote these verses is impossible. However, we can conclude that the authority they maintained to speak about their children and the social issues that they advocated, were strengthened by three

discursive moves. The *Madres* established that their children maintained a continuing presence in their daily lives. They authorized themselves as the appropriate carriers of their children's political legacy. And they refused to acknowledge the physical deaths of their children. Many critics have read this final component as the eternal hopefulness of the mother, with some essentialist leanings: "mothers do not give up, they keep looking for them" (Quesada qtd. in Arditti 96). But it may have served more practical political purposes. Refusing to acknowledge their deaths kept the *desaparecidos* in a limbo land that the military regime originally intended. Ironically, the status of the *desaparecido* -- somewhere between life and death--has allowed the *Madres* to keep their children more discursively alive than if they were officially dead. It has frustrated many Argentines to the point that some admit that an acknowledgement of the killings would be preferable. Radical politician Ricardo Balbín, for example, twice stated to the *Madres* of *desaparecidos* that, "Todos saben que están muertos... Nosotros preferimos a madres llorando sobre sus muertos y no mendigando una respuesta" "Everyone knows that the disappeared are dead ...We would rather have mothers crying over their dead than begging for answers" (qtd. in Mellibovsky 140). The *Madres*' refusals can also be seen as a poignant sign of how respectful the *Madres* have become towards language, after so many lies and so much betrayal. They know how much truth matters and how much power it has in public discourse. As one *Madre* put it, "It is not for me to declare [my daughter] dead,' she wept, 'if they killed her, then they have to say so. For me to say that she's dead would mean that I have killed her'" (Alejandra Leoncio de Ravelo qtd. in Feitlowitz 177).

TESTIMONIAL STRUCTURE

Since so many of the *Madres'* texts are testimonials and their movement emphasizes the collective nature of their actions, I will comment on the genre of testimony itself and what role it plays in the construction of subjectivity. According to John Beverly a testimonial must involve: a "pledge that the giver of the testimony is providing an account of what she personally witnessed...must involve a narrator who speaks for or in the name of a community or group.... The situation of the narrator must be representative of a larger social class or group...is a story that needs to be told – involving a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, exploitation or simple survival that is implicated in the narrative itself" (73-4). The witnessing and urgency are well established in the case of the *Madres*. Independent sources, such as CONADEP (*La Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas*) and Amnesty International, have confirmed many of the *Madres'* accounts and thoroughly documented the violence of the military regime. It is the representation of their accounts, and its gesture towards the formation of a collective identity, that deserves further attention. Whether or not one person and her experience can speak for an entire group is a theme of constant debate among scholars of testimony. The case of the *Madres* is a bit different in this respect. First, of the numerous testimonials I have read, the majority of them feature multiple mothers telling their stories (Fisher, Arditti, Mellibovsky, Bouvard). It is rare to find a testimonial that centers on the experiences of a single mother, most of them weaving together the stories of many diverse women speaking in their own individual voices.²²

What is most striking about these testimonials when taken as a whole is the extent to

²² The exception, of course, is Hebe de Bonafini, the president of the *Asociación de Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, who has had several books written about her life, but who freely acknowledges that different *Madres* had different experiences and never claims her own to represent them all

which they construct a communal voice, and manifest an underlying collective subjectivity. In Fisher, Mellibovsky, and *Historia de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, we can see this structurally in the individual narrations' use of "nosotras" ('we') by many of the *Madres* for sections of their narrations. In the case of the first two, these are interspersed with narrations in the first person singular, when the women narrate experiences and emotions that were particular to them --frequently before they joined with the other *Madres*.²³ Additionally, in all four of these testimonials *Madres* emphasize how important their relationships to other mothers became in the process of searching for their children and protesting. For many of them their isolation before joining the group was unbearable. Their union with other mothers changed that, decreasing their feelings of isolation and increasing their sense of agency, which is vital to subjectivity: "En la Plaza he compartido muchos momentos muy lindos con las Madres. Nos sentíamos muy solidarias, muy unidas en el dolor. Podíamos compartir las esperanzas, las dudas, los miedos... cuando estábamos juntas nos sentíamos fuertes, realmente nos sentíamos fuertes." 'I have shared many beautiful moments with the Mothers. We feel bound to each other, very united in our pain. We could share our hopes, our doubts, our fears...when we were together we felt strong, really strong...' (Mellibovsky 93).

Some *Madres* describe how the solidarity that they experienced in the company of other *Madres*: "Once we were in the Plaza, the fact of being arm in arm, or of walking together, compelled us to return. We really wanted the week to go by quickly so that we could be together" (Mellibovsky 28). These feelings are particularly poignant given that

²³ Several other books on the *Madres*' quote them using the "nosotras" form to narrate but I would not consider them to be testimonies as they privilege the author or editor's analysis as the primary structure, with the *Madres*' commentaries making up a much smaller part of the text. Among these are *De la casa a la Plaza* (Oria) and *Las locas de la Plaza de Mayo* (Bousquet).

many *Madres* described feeling menaced by police and military once in the Plaza. This bond was especially important to *Madres* from whom family and friends had fled, fearing for their own safety or the safety of their relatives: “Vimos alejarse amigos, parientes, vecinos, compañeros de trabajo” ‘We watched friends, relatives, neighbors and work companions distancing themselves from us’ (Gandofi de Salgado in Mellibovsky130).

Much of the testimonial poetry that the *Madres* have published together explores their growing relationships. For many of the *Madres*, joining the group was the first time they were able to speak openly about their losses. As Aline describes in *El corazón en la escritura*:

“ Cuando supe que se lo habían llevado [a mi hijo] un grupo de soldados, tuve como un ataque: se me paralizó la mandíbula, se me arruinó la lengua, y no pude hablar durante unas horas. Y es como si entre las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, hubiera aprendido a hablar de nuevo” (98)

‘When I found out that a group of soldiers had taken [my son], I had a kind of attack: my jaw was paralyzed, my tongue was destroyed, and I couldn’t speak for some hours. And it is as if among the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, I had learned to speak anew.’

In another poem, “*Madre Compañera*” Mimí describes how important the other *Madres* are to her ability to keep going in the face of her loss:

Me apoyo en vos, Madre compañera ... La inseguridad me acompaña desde aquel día que abandoné a mi casa para buscar justicia. Necesito tu fortaleza y comprensión para vencerla ... Me apoyo en vos y así poder desafiar y luchar por la verdad. Me apoyo en vos y todo me acompaña. Reviven mis

ansias...sobrevivo, sonrío...recupero mis fuerzas. Es la vida que llega, se detiene a mi lado, se pone de pie, y 'vamos juntas' me dice 'cada paso será un paso más adelante' (65)'Mother friend, I lean on you.... the insecurity that has been with me since that day that I left my house to look for justice...I need your strength and your understanding to defeat [the anxiety].... I lean on you to be able to challenge and fight for the truth. I lean on you and you all accompany me My anxieties revive...I survive, I smile, I recover my strength. It's life that arrives, it stops at my side, stands up and says 'let's go together...each step will be a step forward.'

Clearly the *Madres* saw each other as emotionally and psychologically invaluable to surviving this period. As their belief systems in so many realms were being destroyed --by the betrayal of the Church and the state-- the women looked to each other to rebuild their subjectivities. These bonds would become the roots of powerful political solidarity as the years progressed.

The *Madres*' reflections on their own processes of writing and organizing also speak to the creation of a collective subjectivity. The metaphor of the communal subject is obvious in the poem of one *Madre* : "Quizá toda nuestra historia pueda resumirse como un paso del yo al nosotros...." 'Perhaps all of our history can be summed up in the step from 'I' to 'we'...' (*El Corazon* 33). Testimonial theorist George Yúdice describes this transition as subjects using the narrative to "rework their identity" (46). Yúdice emphasizes the agency that such narratives require and the solidarity with others that narrators discover through their own experiences of narration. In the case of the *Madres* this can be seen in several ways. First, the

mothers' protests in the Plaza are a type of narrative themselves. Their individual decisions to go to the Plaza, overcoming physical insecurity and social stigma, are narratives themselves that many of them relate through their testimonies.

Additionally, the space of the Plaza became a place where the women told each other their stories: whom they had lost, how, and how they were surviving now: "El hecho de tener a un desaparecido, solamente eso, hacía que estableciera una hermandad entre nosotros" 'The fact of having a disappeared person, that alone, created a sisterhood among us.' (Gard de Antokoletto qtd. in Mellibovsky 40). There are numerous testimonial descriptions of the strength that the *Madres* gained from their shared marches and ongoing relationships with other *Madres*, all of which contributed to reconstructing their identities. The basis for these new subjectivities were elements that were foreign to traditional patriarchal paradigms: relationships and emotion. Ironically, the *Madres* played on traditional essentialist motherhood to gain access to the public sphere—mothers are emotional, not rational; relationship-oriented, not independent; private subjects, not public actors. But once inside the public sphere it became clear that they were fundamentally different political beings. The basis for their collective voices was not the rational individual subject, but the collective, emotional one. Their form of politics violated the decorum and hierarchy that was privileged in patriarchal politics. The content of their politics was "private," the family, not "public," the state.

The construction of a communal voice was also facilitated by the *Madres*' use of essentialism. The fact that they belong together in a way that is obvious to outsiders and produces immediate associations with specific "essences" made it easier

for them to narrate as a body. The fact that many of the *Madres'* testimonials were edited or facilitated by one of their own members (Mellibovsky, Arditti, and the *Asociación de Madres de Plaza de Mayo*) also makes them more transparent in terms of production.

Testimonials edited by a professional --Bouvard, Fisher, Bousquet, and Oria, among others-- are generally accompanied by a preface or introduction that positions the intermediary and his/her prejudices and professional interests. All four of these editors/interlocutors express solidarity towards the *Madres'* projects, revealing their investigative methods to varying degrees. The structure of all four alternates between the voices of individual *Madres* --some of whom choose to speak in the “we” form-- and commentary or analysis by the editor. Although present in all four, we can see the intentional construction of collective identity most clearly in Jo Fisher’s introduction to the *Mothers of the Disappeared*:

[This book] is intended as a history of a collective struggle rather than as a series of testimonies of individual women. This reflects the priority expressed by the *Madres* themselves who, while always willing to discuss their own personal cases, believe the emphasis should be on their collective action against a state-organized system of repression designed to eliminate all opposition or potential opposition, not a series of unrelated individuals.

Many of the *Madres'* testimonies portray not only a collective identity shared with the other *Madres*, but a sense that they have become mothers to all the disappeared children: “Seguí buscando a mis hijos y a los hijos de todas porque para mí, tu hija es

mía, es un poco mía. Mis hijos son poco tuyos... porque los hijos son de cada una de esas rondas que hacemos...” ‘I keep on looking for my children and everybody else’s children, because to me your daughter is my daughter, she’s a little bit mine. My children are a little bit yours...because the children belong to everyone, to every person who walks in those circles we walk in....’ (Robles de Zurita qtd. in Mellibovsky 87). This idea was first embodied by the actions of one of the founding *Madres*, Esther Careaga, whose 16-year old daughter was miraculously freed by the dictatorship. After settling her daughter safely in Brazil, Careaga went back to Argentina to continue protesting for the release of the other *desaparecidos*, demonstrating just how profoundly she shared their losses.²⁴ Since that period this paradigm has become one of the rhetorical cornerstones of the Asociación’s activism. On the twentieth anniversary of the beginning of the *Madres*’ protests, the headline of *Página 12* read, “Todos son nuestros hijos” ‘They Are All Our Children,’ a reference to the phrase that appears so often in testimonials and interviews of various *Madres*. Hebe de Bonafini, the president of the Asociación explains the phrase with “Las *Madres* no luchamos para nosotras, luchamos para los otros porque el otro soy yo, y cuando uno lucha para uno mismo tiene mucha fuerza, mucha fuerza” ‘The mothers don’t fight for ourselves, we fight for the ‘other’ because I am the ‘other,’ and when one fights for oneself, you have a lot of strength’ (Ginzberg 2002). The rhetorical move of taking all of the *desaparecidos* as their children is one that demonstrates their collective subjectivity, established largely through essentialist portrayals of their members.

²⁴ Careaga was, herself, disappeared and murdered by the regime in 1977. Her remains were identified along with two other murdered *Madres* in 2005.

The union of the *Madres*' voices is a powerful political stance because the women are fighting as a group for a single purpose. Their maternity, which they had earlier defined in terms of their individual children has discursively morphed into something more singular and thus, more powerful. As political scientist Guillermo O'Donnell attests, in the context of an authoritarian state: "what meant almost certain death was any attempts to use horizontal voice" (O'Donnell 254). Horizontal voice is created, of course, by colluding with people who were similarly situated as subjects of a repressive regime. The dictatorship sought to control this because it realized that the construction of horizontal voice was the primary threat to their hegemony. The descriptions that the *Madres* provide in many of these testimonials exhibit just the dynamic that the dictatorship feared – the sharing of stories, comparison of details, growth of solidarity, and the formation of a collective identity. In many ways testimonials are the ideal genre for the *Madres* in their unique set of circumstances. As a genre they are inherently political texts, intending "not to portray reality but to transform it" (Dalton qtd. in Harlow 73). They are texts that blur the private and the public --much like the *Madres* did-- by using non-professional voices to tell stories from the private sphere in a public forum. Testimonials grant witnesses the highest level of authority possible, complimenting the *Madres*' reliance on emotion –generally not considered to have a high level of authority in the public sphere. And they subtly grant an elevated authority because of their roots in legal and religious settings: "bearing witness has always been considered a sacred responsibility throughout Christendom"²⁵ (Sommer 130).

²⁵ Testimonials theorists John Beverly and Mark Zimmerman have both commented on these origins.

ESSENTIALISM IN FLUX: STRATEGIC AND EXPERIENTIAL

ESSENTIALISMS

Philosopher and feminist Sara Ruddick's work on *Maternal Thinking* helps to find a middle ground between proscriptive essentialism and poststructural denial of the existence of the subject. Ruddick cogently deconstructs notions of mothers as "naturally" suited to the chores of mothering without denying the very common observation that mothers in varying cultures share some similar strengths. She suggests a new paradigm in describing motherhood as a profession with specific goals and skills that grow out of on-the-job-training. "Preserving the lives of children is the central constitutive, invariant aim of maternal practice; the commitment to achieve that aim is the constitutive maternal act..." (19). Mothers are emotionally attentive because they have had to respond to the urgent needs of non-verbal children for years. So, they have learned to read people in ways that other professions do not require. They are creative because children are demanding, short-tempered and unpredictable. So, to engage in maternal practice is "to be committed to meeting those [children's] demands by works of preservative love, nurturance and training"(17). Doing this work grounds mothers in what Ruddick calls an epistemology of "maternal thinking." The daily struggle to fulfill children's needs causes mothers to adopt certain ways of thinking about the world that they inhabit with their children. Maternal thinking is, in Ruddick's view, a discipline that identifies "questions, methods and aims" for reaching the above goals, and requires constant revisions, judgments, and analysis, much like any other discipline (24). The particular demands of mothering –patience with young children who cannot articulate their needs and are frequently ruled by emotion—leads to certain patterns in maternal thinking. Others

include a tolerance for ambiguity, inclusion of emotion in problem solving and a preference for concrete (vs. abstract) thinking.

Viewing the testimonial narratives of the *Madres* through this lens demystifies some of the magic of maternal love. Ruddick also acknowledges what most mothers have known for years: “What we are pleased to call ‘mother-love’ is intermixed with hate, sorrow, impatience, resentment, and despair; thought-provoking ambivalence is a hallmark of mothering” (68). While this ambivalence is revealed in the *Madres*’ more private testimonials, their public performance of motherhood emphasizes their devotion and attachment to their children. On the other hand, we will see that the dictatorship focuses on these latter elements in order to further naturalize maternal love and its nationalist extension, “maternal duty.”

Although Foucault goes too far in his dismissal of the subject and fails to adequately acknowledge the roles of emotion and relationships in the formation of subjectivity, one of his tools is still useful to this project: the genealogy. A genealogy of Argentine motherhood, which I attempt in my historical analysis of *marianismo* and *machismo*, is useful in sorting out where essentialisms work to occlude authentic selves and where they express selves based on half-truths or constructions by hegemonic forces. I believe that Foucault would, ironically, share some ground with feminist critics in seeking to discourage what I have called proscriptive essentialism. Rather than argue from “the basis of what we essentially are,” Foucault urges us to examine “who we have become constituted to be, to ask what we might become....Its principle is freedom, but a freedom which does not follow from any postulation of our nature or essence.”

(Rajchman 166-167) This is similar to the distinction that Adrienne Rich makes with her

framing of the essentialist identity of woman. Better than to ask, “‘What is a woman?’” she argues that we should ask: “‘Where, when and under what conditions have women acted and been acted upon as women?’” (214) We can use this model to ask the same questions about mothers. Instead of asking: ‘What is a mother?’ We should ask: ‘Where, when and under what conditions have mothers acted and been acted upon as mothers?’

While Foucault’s genealogical method is useful for sorting out the interplay of discourses, his reluctance to acknowledge a “self” existing outside of discourse is still an impediment to thoroughly understanding the *Madres*’ group formation and the group’s contributions to discourse. While the women, themselves, are quick to point out the ways in which they realized their construction as objects by patriarchal forces such as the military and the Catholic church, their narratives consistently circle back to agency rooted in relationships. They were able to act --in Foucault’s view to produce a new discourse-- because of their relationships with other *Madres*, and their love for their children. Foucault would probably argue that their “actions” were really the production of new discourse but I contend that the *Madres* perceived some essential “self” that was transformed through these experiences. Foucault does not adequately represent the role of the subject or emotion in his schema and without these we cannot truly understand the agency and power of this group of women.

BEYOND ESSENTIALISM: IMPERFECT MOTHERS

The essentialism that the *Madres* made use of sometimes worked too well, especially in the post-dictatorship era. In some circles the *Madres* are mythologized, a discourse that they discourage, in keeping with their insistence on truth:

A veces la gente idealiza, pero yo soy una persona común, que tengo todos los problemas de la gente: una mamá de 86 años que tiene miedo de que me pase algo, una bolsa de ropa sucia para lavar porque hace cuatro días que no voy a casa, problemas de dinero porque tengo poca pensión.... (Bonafini qtd. in Schmidt, March 27,1996).

Sometimes people idealize us but I am a normal person, who has all the same problems as everyone: a mother who is 86 who is afraid that something will happen to me, a bag of dirty laundry to wash because it has been four days since I have been at home, money problems because I have a very small pension...

Other *Madres* have tried to deconstruct such images of themselves as angelic or embodiments of some pure motherhood. Matilde Mellibovsky does this by sharing her own ambivalence about her missing daughter, Graciela. She describes their conflicts: “Teníamos muchos desencuentros, nos peleábamos muchísimo porque las dos éramos de carácter bastante fuerte y por ahí discutíamos por macanas” ‘We had many differences; we would quarrel a lot because both of us had very strong personalities and sometimes we’d quarrel about nonsense” (234). She highlights her daughter’s imperfections with: “No quiero idealizar a Gra como si hubiera sido un ser perfecto. Quiero recordarla con todas sus falencias y debilidades” ‘I don’t want to idealize Gra as if she were a perfect human being. I want to remember her with all of her faults and her weaknesses” (248).²⁶ Another *Madre*, Carmen Robles de Zurita, also refuses to make herself or her son into a heroic figure: “Mi hijo era un chico común y corriente, como cualquiera, pero venía y te contaba de la necesidad ajena” ‘My son was an ordinary kid, like any other kid, but he would come and talk about the needs of others’ (Robles de Zurita qtd. in Mellibovsky

²⁶ In Sara Ruddick’s *Maternal Thinking* she that ambivalence towards one’s children is a normal emotion in mothers, and one that is often stifled by cultural expectations that mothers worship their children (68).

84). While these gestures complicate the *Madres'* narratives for some, they ultimately bring us closer to understanding the women as subjects –private and public—and the ways that they sought to represent their experiences. Their narrations of motherly love as imperfect, even ambivalent, certainly challenge one of the foundations of traditional essentialist motherhood: extreme maternal sacrifice and devotion.

CONTEMPORARY DEMOCRATIC POLITICS: ESSENTIALISM LIVES ON

The evolution of the *Madres'* discourse into a much wider socio-political movement has been gradual. In the early stages of their movement the focus was almost exclusively on the recovery of their children. But as the years passed and it became clear that most of the missing had been killed, they shifted their focus to prosecution of the perpetrators.²⁷ When these efforts were frustrated by the very democratic governments that they had supported during the repression, the *Madres* began to see the problem as a more systemic one, of which their children's murders were only a symptom. That democratic governments were not aggressively prosecuting the crimes of the dictatorship was a sign to the *Madres* that they were working in conjunction with the military. Several historians of the Argentine transition to democracy have noted that the laws of *Punto Final*, ('Final Stop') 1986, and *Obedencia Debida*, (Due Obedience) 1987, were measures that arose primarily to keep the still-powerful military at bay. Fearing another coup from the large, powerful military, Raúl Alfonsín, Carlos Menem, and Fernando de la Rúa, sought to appease the participants in the repression by offering legal protections from prosecution. The amnesty laws were a product of this effort but were unacceptable

²⁷ This was exposed by the confessions of several involved in the murders. For a narrative example of this, see Horacio Verbitsky's *Vuelos de la Muerte (The Flight: Confessions of an Argentine Dirty Warrior)*.

to the *Madres* for obvious reasons. The *Madres* became progressively more radical as they realized that the project of democracy was being privileged over justice for their children. Inspired by the idealism of their children's activism, the *Madres* also began to engage the social injustices that their children had worked against. Studying these causes, about which many of them were ignorant or apathetic, was an eye opener. Many narrate it as an important component of their rebirths: "Las Madres tuvimos que aprender muchísimas cosas; todavía hoy un grupo de mis compañeras que asisten regularmente a cursos de Historia; ahora ellas quieren saber los motivos, reales y políticos, de las circunstancias tan nefastas a las que llegamos" ' We mothers had to learn a lot of things. Even today, a group of my companions attend history classes regularly. They want to know the motives, real and political, that have led to such fateful circumstances as the ones that they have been involved in" (Mellibovsky 73). With this newly found energy, the *Madres* began claiming their right to participate in defining the terms of the new democracy. Any forms that did not privilege justice for their children have been heartily protested throughout the democratic era.

As cited in their testimonials, the *Madres'* supernatural connections to their children are an important part of their authority and were frequently performed contemporary protests. In marches they have often read lists of the names of the *desaparecidos*, followed by the communal call "presente!" ("here!") Their demonstrations often invoke their children's physical presences with enormous photos of their faces or life-sized silhouettes. "Los rostros de nuestros hijos nos estarán mirando" 'Our children's faces will be watching us" (Hebe de Bonafini in Soriano 1995). In interviews and articles they allude to this continuing connection with their missing

children: “La plaza es un reencuentro con nuestros hijos y con las otras *Madres*. No es que la Plaza me tranquilice, pero siento que estoy siendo la voz de Gustavo y de ellos, ese momento en la plaza no cambio por nada....” ‘The Plaza is a reunion with our children and with the other mothers. It’s not that it calms me but I feel that I am hearing the voice of Gustavo [my disappeared son] and the others, such moments in the Plaza I wouldn’t change for anything....’ (Nora Cortiña qtd. in *Página 12*, March 24, 1996). Speaking of the physical space of the Plaza, Matilde Mellibovsky describes how “Se siente los chicos, los chicos están presentes....’ los chicos no están, pero sin embargo yo los sigo viendo saltando entre mis canteros... You feel it, the children are present....’ The children are not here but I see them skipping among the flowerbeds...’ (Mellibovsky 23). “Ahora vienen cada jueves, del brazo de sus madres. Cuando ustedes terminan cada jueves el rito y se retiran, ellos se quedan mirándolas alejarse, confundiéndose con las sombras de la tarde, en un gris sin matices, esperando la próxima semana” ‘Now [*los desaparecidos*] come every Thursday, arm in arm with their mothers. When we finish the rite and leave, they stay behind looking on while we move farther away, mingling with the evening shadows, waiting for the week that will follow” (Mellibovsky 24). “Es un jueves más, uno de los tantos en que sentimos a nuestros hijos: Ellos habitan esta plaza con sus sueños y esperanzas” ‘It is one more Thursday, one of the many in which we feel our children here: They inhabit this plaza with their dreams and their hopes’ (Bonafini in Keve 2005). Whether emotional, physical or spiritual the *Madres* claim connections to their children that are based on the intensity of the mother-child bond. Beyond just speaking for justice for their own children, the *Madres* go one step further and take on the causes for which those children are agitated. The *Madres* accomplish this by narrating their

own rebirths, through their disappeared children. The *Madres*' emphasis on their physical roles in the birth cycle (poetry), devotion to their children (testimonials), and supernatural proximity to them (in protest) combine to permit this inheritance of their political legacy. Through the rebirth metaphor, the *Madres* are able to participate in contemporary issues of social justice, thus remaining a relevant political force decades after their children's disappearances.

In one theatrical production of the *Madres*' plight, two *Madres* imagine how their missing children would have been active if they had survived the dictatorship: "Las chicas estarían en las asambleas, gritarían basta de hambre... Pablo estaría en las calles pidiendo justicia" 'The girls would be in the assemblies, they would shout 'enough with hunger'... Pablo would be in the streets calling for justice' (Ginzberg May 2 2002). The insertion of very specific political platforms into the legacy of the *desaparecidos* is a move that may concern serious readers of testimonials. Scholars of the genre have long debated the extent to which fellow-survivors can speak for those who have not survived a communal trauma, or in this case, the extent to which the *Madres* really can say what their children would have supported or rejected politically. Some of the *Madres* have embraced a politics that even sympathetic Argentines have called "radical." Since the political climate has changed significantly from the 1970s—in large part because of the atrocities of the dictatorship—it is difficult to assess where individual *desaparecidos* would have positioned themselves. And it is inaccurate to say that the *desaparecidos* as a group represented any homogenous political position. These questions are rarely speculated on publicly in Argentina as far as I can tell, as many would probably cry sacrilege, but they are important because they allow us to approach the *Madres*'

contemporary political activity with a discerning eye. Their victimization by a truly horrible regime does not make them above critique, especially given the significant power they maintain in contemporary political discourse.

If we look closely at the discursive dynamics around this issue we can see that the *Madres*, dipping into more reductive framings, create an essentialist quality around their claim to authority over the legacy of their children's politics. The *Madres'* descriptions of their continuing connections to their children are heavy with spiritual language, as if invoking their approval for political action: "Nuestra participación en todos los ámbitos es también una forma de recuperar la lucha de nuestros hijos" "Our participation in all these areas [of political action] is also a way of recovering the fight of our children" (Hebe de Bonafini in *Página 12*, April 28, 2002). The rhetoric of the *Asociación de Madres de Plaza de Mayo* has grown increasingly more radical over the years, with the president attesting that all the missing children were Marxists and "revolucionarios" (Bonafini qtd. in Castelnovo 1995). This broad-stroke portrayal of all of the *desaparecidos'* political identities is problematic in the face of theories of testimonies. It also contradicts individual testimonies of several *Madres* who claim that their children were only marginally involved in political action.

Many commentators have emphasized the extent to which the dictatorship was caught off guard by the *Madres*. There are far fewer analyses of how the democratic administrations of Menem and Alfonsín appear to have been similarly seduced by traditional images of mothers. Several democratic administrations believed that they could predict the *Madres'* actions and keep them within certain parameters. Their tensions with the *Madres* show that they were surprised by their inability to easily fold

the women's identities into their democratic project. Their primary conflict with the *Madres* has been the women's refusal to work within the new democratic system. . After years of intransigence around the issue of prosecuting the crimes of the repressive era, some of the *Madres* cut off contact with democratic forces, refusing even to vote.²⁸ A 1998 editorial by Hebe de Bonafini and Juana Pargament, both *Madres* de la Plaza de Mayo, declares that: "Proponemos no votar, mientras que no existen políticos honestos que representan el pueblo en lugar de sus propios intereses" "We propose not voting until there are some honest politicians who represent the interests of the community instead of their own" (February 13). While democratic administrations had to admit that the *Madres*: "ganaron en buena ley la autoridad moral y el respeto que tiene el país y el mundoSin embargo, los que quieran autoridad política tendrán que afiliarse a algún partido o fundar el propio" "fairly won the moral authority and the respect of the country and the world...Nevertheless, those who want political authority have to affiliate themselves with some party or found their own" (Durán 1996). Much like the dictatorship, they were willing work with the *Madres* only when they behaved in certain ways proscribed by patriarchal institutions. Their inability to pinpoint exactly what frustrated them about the *Madres*' power is evident when they lash out at the *Madres* in ways that violate even the most traditional notions of respect for motherhood. In 1991 President Menem publicly criticized the *Madres* for dwelling on their missing children with: " 'deben dejar de cargar con sus muertos y olvidar' lo sucedido durante la repression desatada en el país por el último regimen militar" "They should stop carrying

²⁸ The *Madres* split into two groups in 1986 over several issues related to their political activities: the degree to which they would work collaboratively with democratic administrations and their attitudes towards the government's offer of reparations. The groups are now the Madres de Plaza de Mayo:Línea Fundadora and la Asociación de Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

around their dead and forget what happened during the repression unleashed in the country by the last military regime' ("Menem" 1991). He even dips into Biblical framings, an old trick of the dictatorship, to try to bring the *Madres* back into line: "aconsejando a las Madres que hagan 'como la sentencia bíblica que dice que los muertos lloren a los muertos'" 'advising the *Madres* to do as the Biblical proverb states and 'let the dead mourn for the dead' ("Menem" 1991).

Up until Kirchner's administration, the *Madres* have been frequently characterized by democratic administrations as uncooperative and uncontrollable, revealing a continuing surprise at the *Madres*' refusal to behave properly, as defined by essentialist notions. Hebe de Bonafini, president of the Asociación, has been particularly vilified by government officials, at the same time that they acknowledge her moral authority.²⁹ On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the last military coup in 1996, Carlos Corach, Minister of the Interior, captured the ambivalence that many Argentines feel about the *Madres*: "es peligroso juntarse con gente como Hebe de Bonafini, que goza de respeto universal" 'It is dangerous to join in with people like Hebe de Bonafini, who is universally respected' (*Página 12*, March 23, 1996). While the contemporary *Madres* often provoke frustration in fellow Argentines—a theme I will explore more thoroughly in chapter two-- their moral authority is undeniable. Corach's mixed message in this quote captures some of that ambivalence. In this case Bonafini refused to allow the military and police to provide security for the twenty-four hour march that drew tens of thousands of people. The government even went to court to order the march canceled because of security concerns, calling Bonafini irresponsible. A

²⁹ Bonafini has also taken stands that are quite controversial, such as celebrating the 9/11 attack on the United States.

judge refused the request, a victory that was celebrated in *Página 12* with a banner headline, “Toda la Plaza es para mí” ‘All of the Plaza is for Me.’ (March 22 1996).

Democratic regimes have been particularly unsettled by the *Madres*’ continuing activism abroad. Their alliances with nations that have chosen to prosecute Argentine defendants in *absentia* --France, Italy, Germany and Switzerland, among them-- have been especially troubling. The *Madres* have lobbied their own governments unsuccessfully for the extradition of Argentines to these countries to face sentencing and jail time. These tensions have highlighted the chasm between political motherhood and the national Argentine identity that the *Madres* have preserved. Much like the dictatorship who claimed that the *Madres* could not be true Argentines and work for justice from outside of the nation state, democratic administrations have cast doubt on the *Madres*’ loyalty to the nation in their pursuance of international mechanisms of justice. In 1991 President Menem suggested that the *Madres*’ activities were evidence that “deben estar financiadas por algún país como Cuba o fundaciones europeos, ya que no tienen fondos para viajar como lo hacen” ‘they must be financed by countries like Cuba or other European foundations because they don’t have the money to travel like they do’ (“Menem” 1991).

In addition to encouraging foreign governments to file charges in Argentina, the *Madres* have also allied themselves with a number of groups outside Argentina with whose revolutionary causes they sympathize. The Movimiento Revolucionario de Tupac Amaru (MRTA) in Peru and the Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) in Spain are examples of the many groups that the *Madres* have endorsed. Their affiliations with several of these groups have won them criticism from a variety of sources. One editorial

by Argentine writer Eduardo Goligorsky entitled, “Madres peligrosas,” (‘Dangerous Mothers’) attacked the *Madres* for their alliance with the Basque group – an armed leftist group labeled as terrorists by many Spaniards³⁰ (*La Nación*, July 25, 1976). The *Madres* have also sympathized publicly with a Peruvian group, el Movimiento Revolucionario de Tupac Amur (Tupac Amur Revolutionary Movement), which in the 1990s was characterized by Fujimori’s administration as a terrorist organization. The *Madres*’ even traveled to Perú in response to the group’s appeals for mediation in 1997 during a two-month standoff between the MRTA and the Peruvian government at the Japanese ambassador’s residence in Lima. The *Madres* were never granted the audience with President Fujimori and the standoff ended in the deaths of most of the Marxist sympathizers. (*Washington Post*, April 23, 1997). The fact that the *Madres* were identified by MRTA (the Tupac Amur Revolutionary Movement) as an activist group on whose assistance they could rely speaks to their international visibility as a human rights group. And in fact, the *Madres* did sympathize with MRTA’s stance, framing it in broad terms parallel to those they used to describe social inequality in Argentina, “toma de la casa del embajador fue ocasionado por la situación caótica que vive Perú, por el hambre infernal de casi toda la población” ‘The taking of the ambassador’s residence was inspired by the chaotic situation in which Peru lives, by the infernal hunger of almost all of the population’ (Bonafini in “Las Madres, mediadoras entre Fujimori y el MRTA” 1997).

The *Madres* have also lent their solidarity and experience to foreign mothers’ groups who look to them for guidance. The Mothers of prisoners in Manhattan, who also called themselves the Mothers of the New York Disappeared sponsored the Argentine

³⁰ In the Basque language the ETA stands for *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* “Basque Fatherland and Liberty”

Madres' trip to the U.S. in 2004 to help them protest the mandatory minimum sentencing laws.³¹ Seeking the revision of mandatory drug sentencing laws in the U.S. these New York mothers protested outside Governor Pataki's office with their Argentine counterparts. The Argentine women encouraged the North Americans to articulate their campaign in terms of human rights, a discursive move that vaults them over the authority of their nation state. Enriqueta Maroni, herself a *Madre de la Plaza de Mayo* draws parallels between the two groups with, “‘ Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo transformamos nuestro dolor en lucha y resistencia activa. Los neoyorquinos deben unirse para combatir esta violación a los derechos humanos’” ‘The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo transformed our pain into fight and active resistance. The neoyorquinos should unite to combat this type of human rights violation’ (“Con las madres de Manhattan” 2004).

Despite their popularity abroad, hostility towards the *Madres* inside Argentina continues, taking various forms such as death threats, break-ins at their offices, and banning them from certain public ceremonies.³² Paralleling their resilience during the dictatorship's era, the *Madres'* reactions to such challenges have been remarkable. As Hebe de Bonafini, who continues to be one of the most visible and outspoken *Madres* in 2006, has said about threats on her own life and that of her surviving daughter, “Nunca dejaron de amenazarme, cada tanto pasa algo así ... Son mensajes para que me acuerde que están siempre ahí” ‘They never stopped threatening me. Every so often something like this happens ... They are messages so that I remember that they are always there’ (R.L. 1995).

³¹ Many of these U.S. mothers have lost children to violence in jails. They blame mandatory minimums for their children's lengthy incarcerations.

³² The Catedral Metropolitana was closed by a federal judge on June 6, 2002, to prevent the *Madres* from occupying it and continuing a hunger strike (*Página 12*, June 7, 2002).

Despite these risks the *Madres*' continuing influence can be seen in several developments. Their agitation against the untried criminals of the repression has led several military and police officers to maintain a hermetic existence. Once publicly identified by the *Madres* such officers were regularly met with noisy protests at their homes or places of work, which made their public lives embarrassing and impractical.³³ The *Madres*' pressures also lead many officers to retire early, as in the case of the infamous Alfredo Astiz, who infiltrated the early *Madres*' group, posing as a relative of a *desaparecido*. He is believed responsible for the disappearance of three of the founding *Madres*. Even his superiors in the Navy admit that his voluntary retirement “indudablemente alivia las tensiones que han existido con organismos de derechos humanos,” ‘undoubtedly alleviates the tensions that have existed with human rights groups’ --a clear reference to the *Madres*' and other human rights groups' activism (Eduardo Bauzá qtd. in *Página 12*, December 6, 1995).

H.I.J.O.S : THE NEXT GENERATION:

As the formal prosecution of the guilty has stalled over years and finally decades, the *Madres*' indignation has only grown, and they have come to make even broader claims to solidarity: “Donde exista un hombre o una mujer o un niño que se rebele contra la injusticia, el viento le traerá el agitar de nuestros pañuelos para acompañarlo en su lucha. Mientras la voz de un joven se eleve contra los poderosos, allí estarán las Madres: sembrando ideales, entregando la vida” ‘Wherever a man or woman or child rebels against injustice, the will will ruffle our headscarves to accompany their fight. While the voice of one young person is raised against the powerful, the *Madres* will be

³³ These organized protests are known as “escrache,” a term meaning “to throw something down and stomp on it” – from interviews with Argentines, 2005.

there: planting ideals, giving their lives ‘ (Soriano 1996). The essentialist imagery here is powerful and shows how thoroughly the *Madres* have embraced their children’s activism. In the same way that their children are now supernaturally present, the *Madres* themselves are symbolically present whenever there is injustice.

Not only have the *Madres* authorized themselves to take up the legacy of their children’s activism, but they have used essentialism to pass on this authority to a coming generation of activists, los H.I.J.O.S. Seen as the *Madres*’ spiritual, if not biological children, los H.I.J.O.S, “Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia y contra el Olvido y el Silencio,” (“Children for Identity and Justice and Against Forgetting and Silence’) is made up of biological children of *desaparecidos* and other young, sympathetic human rights activists. The *Madres* have discursively authorized these activists to carry the torch of the *desaparecidos*, after the mothers themselves have gone. As they symbolically passed the emblem of their struggle, the *pañuelo* (‘headscarf’) to these activists in a 2002 ceremony, they stressed the maternal connection that they feel to these youth: ‘Para nosotras es una alegría darles nuestro símbolo a estos H.I.J.O.S., que consideramos nuestros hijos’” ‘For us it is a joy to give our symbol to these H.I.J.O.S., whom we considered to be our children’ (Ginzberg 2002). As film-maker Lila Stantic observes of this passage: “No van a morir nunca porque la bandera la van a recoger los jovenes” ‘[The *Madres*] will never die because the youth are going to take up their flag’ (Stantic 2002). But this move is not merely a symbolic one. Many of *Madres* relate how they feel the presence of their missing children in the spirit of these young activists: “ Mi hijo está en cada uno de ellos [la juventud], ahí lo veo reflejado, con sus inquietudes, sus preguntas, sus audacias. Vivan ellos y mi hijo!” ‘My son is in each of them [the youth],

there I see him reflected, with his worries, his questions, his boldness. Long live the youth and my son!’ (Virginia *Cantos* II, 28).

In the same way that the *Madres* relied indirectly on essentialism to establish themselves as the rightful heirs to their children’s legacy of activism, they use essentialist moves to authorize this passage to a new generation. As they have done throughout their discourse, the *Madres* stress that their motherhood has become much more than just biology. They are now mothers to all of the disappeared children. They are mothers to a movement for justice. They are mothers to the biological grandchildren whom they rescued from illegal adoptions. They have also developed a mothering relationship with these youths who share the ethic of their missing children. Again, this nurturing quality in mothers is framed in traditionally essentialist ways. Ironically, it was just this legacy that the dictatorship sought to disrupt in separating newborns from their “subversive” mothers’ ideology. Now, the grandchildren of these *desaparecidos* are taking up their calls with even more vigor, linked by the *Madres*’ physical and spiritual mothering to their missing parents. As the granddaughter of murdered *Madre*, Azucena Villaflor de Vicenti, described at her 2002 memorial: “‘Ella pudo conocer solamente a uno de nosotros, pero todos nosotros conocemos su lucha. Hace 25 años, cuando mi abuela entraba hacia la muerte, yo estaba naciendo; ahora viene en camino su bisnieto. El es la prueba de la continuidad de la lucha y de la vida’” ‘She was able to know only some of us but we all know her fight. Twenty-five years ago, when my grandmother [Azucena Villaflor] was moving towards death, I was being born; now her great-grandchild is on the way. This is proof of the continuity of the fight and of life’” (Vales 2002). Her echo of the *Madres*’ discursive use of the rebirth motif is testament to its success.

The H.I.J.O.S movement has borrowed several of the discursive strategies from the *Madres*. They frequently construct their entire generation as inheritors of the *Madres*' legacy, and keepers of the true history of the repression. In their struggle to identify all of the grandchildren of the *Madres* (children of the *desaparecidos*) who were adopted illegally out of their biological families, they stress that such truths affect all Argentines: "todos los de su generación podemos ser *desaparecidos* mientras haya una sola persona con su identidad falseada" 'All of your generation could be *desaparecidos*, while there is just one person still living with a false identity' (Perez 2001).

CONCLUSION

The H.I.J.O.S.' articulation of how they see their struggles –for historical accuracy, and the integrity of the political subject– illustrates how the *Madres*' legacy is about more than simply justice for the *desaparecidos*. It is a struggle over much larger territories: the history of the nation, the rights of Argentine citizenship, and the possibility of an ethos whose authority supersedes that of the nation. The *Madres* have faced diverse oppositions in their lengthy protests: the dictatorship, the Catholic Church, and most recently, democratic administrations. Throughout these conflicts they have had to struggle for control over the representation of motherhood. That "good" mothers could be prayerful and active --not passive-- was a lesson that the *Madres* have left to their society. They also demonstrated that the single-minded devotion encouraged by traditional Catholicism could be a powerful foe when children were threatened. Mothers' attachment to their children, so idealized in cultural mythology, actually did go beyond the earthly realm and into the supernatural. The *Madres* became conduits for their children's political activism. Similarly, the life-giving roles that traditional sectors are so fond of in

maternal imagery allowed them to give life to a new form of politics, outside of formal structures, authoritarian or democratic. Mothers' "natural" nurturing tendencies could also extend to children and activists outside of their biological families, and could birth another generation of political revolutionaries. This dynamic is also more proof of Sara Ruddick's theory that mothering is a discipline, not an instinct.

Throughout these transformations the *Madres* accomplished an impressive feat: they relied on essentialisms and eschewed them at the same time. To authorize certain activities such as protest and organizing, they relied on the figure of the devoted mother, whose existence revolves around her child. But they refused to adopt the postures that traditionally accompany such devotion – humility and obedience. They have been repeatedly threatened, fought with armed officers, been jailed and beaten. Three of them were kidnapped and murdered. Such forceful courage is not modeled in the quiet desperation of the *mater dolorosa*.

In the same way, the *Madres* have narrated the intense bond between the mother and child in spiritual terms, through their poetry and testimonies. They can feel their children's continuing presence in a breeze or a dream, supernatural descriptions that defy rational explanation. Ironically it is to this spiritual world that the Church and the nationalist state had relegated mothers, while men took care of earthly concerns like the nation. But these mothers repeatedly blurred the private and the public, bringing their spiritual connections into the political realm. Their missing children were urging them to take up their activism. The *Madres* were transformed by this calling and rejected formal political parties. They radicalized the motherhood that was supposed to keep them quiet and obedient.

In the process the essentialisms of the dictatorship, the Church and later democratic administrations have been shown to be narrow and proscriptive. Their aims have been to control mothers, not celebrate them –as some *machistos* pretend-- or empower them. When the *Madres* themselves have dipped into some of these traditional images --mothers as devoted and spiritual-- it has been for diverse reasons. Sometimes these emotions have authentically been part of their lived experiences, as we see in their poetry and testimonials. Other times, performing piety --in their public prayer, for example-- has won them points with target audiences. At times we can't tell what their intentions were, and perhaps the women themselves were ambivalent.

Other contradictions abound. The *Madres* have taken public stands that have required immense courage but have privately narrated their paralyzing fear. They have performed their devotion to their children publicly, while they privately revealed their ambivalence towards these same children. They have prayed fervently in Catholic masses and told of their bitterness at betrayal by their own clergy. In short, the *Madres* have been real women whose contradictions have not destroyed their moral authority. Their authentic passion for their children and their honesty about their painful journeys have given depth to their essentialism and a humility about the complexity of mothering that the authors of proscriptive essentialism lack.

The *Madres* have also grown into savvy political actors. They have been wise enough to see that “erasing the possibility of essence also deprives subjects of a platform from which to create political agendas or build coalitions”(Gaard 233). So, they maintained a discursive foothold in essentialism, built upon foundations distinct from their rivals: relationships between the *Madres*, their shared losses, love for their children

and new formulations of motherhood. In the process they seem aware of the dynamics that Foucault might describe as a genealogy of power: they are consistently aware of the ways that unchecked essentialisms could marginalize their own voices.

Many scholars who have written on the *Madres* attribute too much intentionality to some of their actions. Their choice of white head scarves, the decision to ban fathers from their group and their meetings in churches can all be explained as practical decisions in response to immediate needs and dangers. Thirty years later some observers have interpreted every gesture as part of a larger narrative of political motherhood. But the *Madres* did not start out with a map. As they will admit, “las Madres cometíamos montones de errores, actuábamos a veces de una forma tan inocente e incoherente...” “we Mothers made many mistakes –sometimes we acted in naïve and incoherent ways” (Mellibovsky 104). They have taken many risks over the years, both rhetorical and physical, and there is no single narrative that can encompass them all. If the count of 30,000 *desaparecidos* is accurate, there are thousands of *Madres* whose voices have not even been heard. At least the private poetry and testimonials of a few of the *Madres* allow us to complicate some of the bolder stands that the two groups of *Madres* have taken in public forums like newspapers and speeches.

As far as feminist and poststructuralist debates about the use of essentialisms, the *Madres* cases are a fascinating study. They have inspired a spectrum of reactions: criticism by those who fear a return to proscriptive essentialisms – Feijoó is one; kudos by those with revision and revolution on their minds --feminist theologians, for example; and careful study by students of identity politics who are hopeful about the use of Friedman’s “strategic essentialism.” In the end one of the triumphs of the *Madres* has

been their creation of political subjectivity based on their own lived experiences, rather than essentialist narratives. They were wise enough to see when to reactivate such traditional narratives, under severely repressive conditions for example, but they were never re-interpellated by the dictatorship's narrative of motherhood. In the process they had to abandon multiple structures on which their former identities had been built –the Catholic church, the state and, at times, ambivalent family— and to reconstitute themselves as new beings. Their processes of re-building their identities have little explanation in poststructuralist maps of the subject. Through relationships with other *Madres*, their on-going contact with their missing children, and their willingness to constantly relive their grief over their children to attain justice, feminist theories of relationships and emotion in female subjectivity theorize more of this dynamic but don't really explain the *Madres*' rebirth or their supernatural experiences. And perhaps this is the core of experiential essentialism. Certain experiences change people fundamentally – birthing or raising a child, for example. The way that people are seen and identified by others inflects these experiences greatly: being called a bad mother, or a good Catholic, or a loyal Argentine, for example. How these identities are constructed through religion, economics and migration add layers to the complexity of the subject. One thing seems clear from this study of the *Madres*: to become a mother and to be called a mother are not the same experience.

CHAPTER TWO

Celluloid Protest: *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* in Film

La llevé aquí porque quería saber si Gabby es su nieta. O la nieta de otra Abuela ... o de alguien que ni siquiera tiene la fuerza para hacer rondas en la Plaza con un cartón.

Alicia, *La historia oficial*

I brought her here because I want to know if Gabby is her grandchild. Or the grandchild of another 'Grandmother'... Or of someone else who doesn't even have the strength to walk around the Plaza with a poster.

Alicia, *The Official Story*

I. Historical and Cultural Context for the Films

Films about the most recent Argentine dictatorship are almost as common as written documentaries. Such films fulfill two primary aims -- to document the violence of the era and to record the resistance to the repression. A theme that appears in only some of the films, however, is how the Argentine nation integrates the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* into the tragic history that they have come to embody, and into national discourse. As discussed in the first chapter, the *Madres'* stories have come to represent something much more complex than the murder of their children by the state. The women's protests, which challenged an authoritarian state in collusion with the profoundly patriarchal Catholic Church, also destabilized gender roles within the family. As a consequence the *Madres* undermined the role of the family as a tool of the state and upended traditional boundaries between the public and the private spheres, intimately bound up with the traditions of *machismo* and *marianismo*. Finally, the women's protests also created a model of woman-centered political power that was encouraged, but not fully developed, under Peronism. The destruction of old paradigms and the creation of new ones are processes that were problematic

not only for Argentines who benefited from the old structure, but also for those who associated such paradigms with family tradition or faith. For these citizens the *Madres'* protests were not just political actions but challenges to culture, religion and history. Audience ambivalence towards these changes and towards the *Madres*, themselves, is expressed in diverse, illuminating ways in this body of films.

I selected these five films because each of them centers on the disappearances during the repression and, in varying degrees, on the experiences of the *Madres* de la Plaza de Mayo. I also selected films that were produced over a stretch of almost twenty years and thus, reflect changing attitudes towards the *Madres*. *La historia oficial* (1985), *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (1985), *La amiga* (1991), *Imagining Argentina* (2002), and *Cautiva* (2004) are the five chosen for several reasons. These films also relate to my exploration of the role of essentialism in the *Madres'* protests. First, in distinct ways each problematizes the relationship of Argentines, and particularly mothers, to the private/public split. In all cases the *Madres* blur this line readily. While almost all of the male characters, even those opposed to the dictatorship, resist such blurring, female characters (and the real *Madres*) move more fluidly between the two. Second, each film also addresses the *Madres'* destabilization of the state-family relationship. In refusing to sacrifice their families in the service of the state's Catholic nationalist mission the *Madres* provoked the worst in patriarchal power, revealing some of the regime's truly violent sentiments towards the biological family. In addition, taken as a group, the films represent the progression of time post-dictatorship and a marked change in the depiction of the *Madres* as distance and political change colored their perception by

the public and their own decisions about how to represent themselves. These differences capture much of the continuing ambivalence towards the *Madres* in Argentina and abroad as well as the conflicts inherent in the figure of the political mother. Three of the five films depict the characters of *Madres* as marginal figures, despite storylines that revolve entirely around the search by maternal figures for *los desaparecidos*. This suggests that Argentine audiences have a low tolerance for the figures of the *Madres* and the difficult questions that their legacies entail. Finally, each film presents relationships between women as catalysts for change. It is women working together –under the authority of motherhood and using an epistemology of emotion – who are represented as agents for change. This problematizes Foucault’s focus on the solitary individual as the locus of subjectivity and his reliance on rationality in the discernment of “truth.”

The five films represent different cinematic genres, perspectives, styles and time periods. Each one makes a unique contribution to representing the experiences of the *Madres* or documenting the ambivalence that they provoked. La historia oficial (1985), by far the most widely viewed of all the films, has garnered numerous international awards and has attracted the most attention from film scholars and critics. *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (1985) represents the earliest documentary on the *Madres* and includes footage of the actual *Madres*’ marches from the 1970s. It is a powerful testimony of the group’s first steps in classic Third Cinema form. *La amiga* (1991) is the only fictionalized film whose central character is the mother of a *desaparecido*. While it narrates the story of loss from the perspective of a *madre*, the film powerfully juxtaposes her best friend’s decision to

put the past behind her and move forward. *Imagining Argentina* (2002) is the only film made entirely in English, clearly for a western audience that knows very little about the era in Argentina. It is unique in reversing the gender roles that the *Madres'* protests embodied, by placing a male character in the *Madres'* protests while having the state disappear his outspoken journalist wife. Lastly, *Cautiva* (2004) is the most recent film, narrating the experiences of the children of the disappeared and the integration of the history of the repression into contemporary Argentine political discourse.

In order to appreciate the significance of these films I will first explore several historical and cultural dynamics that shaped the milieu into which they were released. Part of what makes the *Madres'* stories so dramatic is that they challenged several traditional paradigms that had over-determined the relationship of women and mothers to political action in Argentina. While women and mothers had certainly challenged these structures before, the extreme violence of the repression called them to actions that dramatically reversed several traditional roles. They moved suddenly from the private to the public; they destabilized the allegiance of the family to the state; they articulated a powerful woman-centered subjectivity; they reclaimed the Virgin Mary from the traditional narrative of *marianismo*; and they challenged the post-dictatorship democracy to hold the repressors accountable for "el proceso." While all of these dynamics had occurred in other eras in Argentine history, the confluence of political, religious and social circumstances that produced the coup of 1976 created conditions that were so extreme that they could only be countered by

actions that simultaneously deconstructed multiple paradigms that had formerly defined Argentine motherhood.

A. Argentine Motherhood and the Public/Private Split

To adequately address the representation of the private/public split in these films, we must look to the construction of motherhood in the period preceding the dictatorship and its central political movement, *Peronismo*. A social and economic force centered on the figure of Juan Perón, who had led the country for nine years before the coup of 1955 that exiled him to Europe for eighteen years, *Peronismo* was heartily promoted by the president's outspoken wife, Eva Perón. Known to all Argentines by the diminutive, "Evita," she included social programs for the working class and encouraged political participation by the masses.³⁴ Within this group, mothers were considered to be important figures, from a social, political and economic standpoint. Evita, herself, "the mother of the nation," led the campaign that constructed mothers as central figures in Argentine society. To increase birth rates and to stabilize the family unit, Perón encouraged visions of the mother as central to the success of Argentine society:

la mujer fue convocado como coresponsable, junto al Estado, del aumento demográfico, lo que redundaría en el futuro bienestar y riqueza de la 'patria'.

La función maternal se normatizó y racionalizó dándole un cariz acorde a los

³⁴ One of *the desaparecidos* in *La amiga*, Carlos, has a poster of Evita in his shack, which is ransacked by the military during his kidnapping.

requerimientos estatales, lo que cristalizó en otro tipo de interpelación hacia las mujeres en la que se insertó la maternidad social. (DiLiscia, et al. 6)

The woman was called to be responsible, together with the State, for an increase in the birthrate, which would be reflected in the future well being and riches of the fatherland. The function of motherhood was normalized and rationalized in keeping with the requirements of the state, in which it was crystallized in another type of interpellation towards women in which social motherhood was inserted.

Evita spoke on a series of radio programs promoting voting rights for women and their right to defend their families, their homes and their well-being. Motherhood went beyond childbirth and was a sacred mission of all women, regardless of their maternal status. (DiLiscia, et al. 10)

La relación de las mujeres con la maternidad y con la familia comenzó a transformarse, aunque la exaltación del rol materno era la misión sagrada de la mujer (Biachi, 1993). La maternidad era considerada una función social o espiritual independientemente de la concepción de hijos; es decir la maternidad atravesaba el ámbito hogareño y se consideraba una función inscripta en el conjunto social por las mujeres que realizaban tareas extradomésticas (DiLiscia et al. 10)

The relationship of women to motherhood and to the family began to transform itself, even though the exaltation of the maternal role was the sacred mission of the woman. Motherhood was considered a social or spiritual

function, independent of the conception of children; which is to say, motherhood dared to cross out of the sphere of the home and was considered inscribed in the surrounding social milieu by women who accomplished work outside of the home.

At the same time that motherhood seems to have gained social currency, women also were being consciously constructed as political actors, given voting rights under Perón in 1947 and encouraged to participate in politics. These substantial advances for women may have distracted from the reality that motherhood was being crafted in traditionally patriarchal terms. To be a mother became the ultimate identity of a woman, biological or otherwise, and the duties to the Patria, as well as service to a male dominant politic, were explicit. The creation of the Partido Peronista Femenino was, in part, to help organize these new female voters and political activists, under the banner of Peronism (DiLiscia et al. 16). While there was still significant opposition to Peronismo, his propaganda, Evita's well-publicized social programs and the cult of personality that surrounded them both had an undeniable effect on the discourse around female citizenship and motherhood in the era.

Evita's promotion of maternal identity as an empowering role for women had several contradictions. While women were encouraged to vote and to become active politically, they were also more closely controlled by the new Partido Peronista Femenino.³⁵ Several underlying messages were clear: First, mothers were important because of the impact they could have on the state's central project –the formation of

³⁵ The Partido Peronista Femenino was established in July of 1949 and women first voted in presidential elections in Nov. 1950, 64% of them for Perón (Calvert, 48).

Perón-oriented citizens. Therefore, obedience to *Peronismo*, a masculine dominated ideology, was vital, as Evita explained in 1949: “To be a Peronist woman [meant] faith in Perón, subordination to Perón, and blind obedience to Perón” (qtd. in Rock 163). Politically active women were encouraged to cloak their activities in characteristics of essentialized womanhood –love, concern for the community, generosity, self-abnegation, putting aside of personal ambition in place of devotion to the cause. Moreover, to a certain extent women and mothers were brought into the political field because they were politically expedient. They were needed in the economy as workers, they were needed as mothers to raise a generation of Peronists and they were needed as civilians who could spread *Peronismo* to their neighbors and female friends.

The motherhood campaign had a similarly paradoxical relation to the public/private divide. While motherhood was transformed into a public identity –in the service of the state—it was also a distinctly private one, fed by the “innate” qualities of womanhood/motherhood. These were qualities that could only be nurtured in the private environment of the home: self-sacrifice, moral uprightness, love and devotion to family.

B. Family and Patriarchy

The actions of the *Madres* also threatened the stability of the traditional Argentine notion of family and patriarchy by refusing to accept the authority of the patriarchal state or to play by the regime’s model of the national family. This, in turn, raised questions about the role of the patriarch in the family –both as representative of

the state and head of the household. All of these films represent these dynamics in distinct ways and reveal the many faces of patriarchal power and the conflict that resulted when the structures of patriarchy are challenged.

To better understand the relationship between patriarchy and family in Argentina we must look back to the arrival of the Spanish in Argentina in the sixteenth century. The men who settled what is now Argentina were composed largely of feudal knights who left Spain in search of riches and adventure. Coming from a family and estate structure based on paternalism, they carried a powerful patriarchal paradigm of male behavior. When combined with the patriarchal character of the Catholic Church, by far the most influential social force next to the state, Argentine politics and family have been profoundly shaped by the tenets of male dominance. Masculinity, particularly in its respect for authoritarian rule and male independence, served as a building block for the nation. Several historians have argued that the cultural figure of the *gaucho* in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries added to the Argentine patriarchy's contempt for women, given that these cattle-herders survived in the almost exclusively male terrain of rural Argentina. Women were strictly relegated to domestic roles, which no doubt fostered the notion of male superiority (Calvert 145-147). Several scholars concur with Diana Taylor's assessment that "in Latin American history men and masculinity are tied to the defense of the nation and protectors of family, home and the people, while women are cast....as reproducers of the nation and wives and mothers...." The heavy handed dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1829-52) also served as a model of

authoritarian rule, embracing both nationalism, *machismo* and Catholicism (Taylor 34).

The paradigm of *machismo*, as discussed in the first chapter, was a significant force in the military dictatorship of the 1970s. As cultural historians Susan and Peter Calvert state, “in a direct sense, *machismo* causes the externalization of violence and aggression and this carries over into politic” (148). The privileging of male authority, backed up by violence, either threatened or actual, was not only a political reality. Its presence in the family continued to be a cultural reality upon which the Argentine dictatorship relied. Several propaganda pieces in the late 1970s directed towards the heads of household (patriarchs), warned them to watch their women and children for signs of subversion during the “dirty war.” Women, in their emotional natures, were particularly vulnerable to influence by terrorist elements. Teenagers, in their naiveté, should be watched for signs of gender deviance, a symptom of dangerous political thinking.

Diana Taylor provides two compelling examples of such propaganda by the dictatorship. In one, a sixteen-year-old girl, Ana María Gonzalez, planted a bomb under the bed of the police chief of Buenos Aires, killing him. Although a true story, it was sensationalized by the regime’s media who used it as an example to all citizens of the potential subversion hidden in female teenagers. In another story a woman is interviewed by *La Nación* and confesses to be a former guerrilla. She describes how her own weakness and misdirection lead her astray (83, 91-117). A third, described in detail in chapter one, has a *madre* recant her public condemnation of the dictatorship after her son’s disappearance and warn other mothers not to be drawn in

by the Montoneros. The challenges that the *Madres'* protests posed to both patriarchy and by extension, to the traditional familial structure, are evident in all of the films that I analyze.

C. Ambivalence towards the *Madres*

Given that the *Madres* de la Plaza de Mayo uprooted a number of paradigms that were central to the organization of Argentine social and political life, it is no surprise that there are conflicting feelings about them in the general population. This ambivalence has continued –some would say even increased—in the era after the fall of the dictatorship (Fisher). While there was a surge of support for the *Madres* immediately following the 1983 collapse of the dictatorship –10 to 15,000 sympathetic protestors joined the *Madres* in their third annual *Marcha de la Resistencia*—their popularity in all sectors did not hold (Vázquez et al. 26). As lawmakers and citizens got down to the hard work of rebuilding a democracy one of their biggest challenges was how to incorporate the military. Although seriously tarnished by the crimes of the previous era the military still held substantial power and many of its mid level leaders were unwilling to step down.³⁶ They were content to let a few upper level commanders take the fall for the violence. In order to appease them, the transitional government of Raul Alfonsín passed the *Ley de Obediencia Debida* (Law of Due Obedience) in 1984, which limited the prosecution of crimes from the era to the nine top members of the three juntas. Alfonsín hoped that rebuking the military enough would appease protestors but not so much that the

³⁶ Three military uprisings in 1987 and 1988 were evidence of the continuing power of the military. One of the primary demands of the revolts was an end to the prosecution of hundreds of military officers for crimes of the dictatorship era (Bouvard 199-201).

military was called to arms again. The December, 1986 *Ley de Punto Final* (Full Stop Law) was another measure aimed at keeping the military in line. It provided an April 1987 deadline for the prosecution of all cases related to the military era. The law proposed that after this deadline no further charges could be brought and no cases could be reopened even with the discovery of new evidence.

These gestures were compromises that the *Madres* would not accept. They wanted investigations and trials for everyone involved at any level with the disappearances. While many Argentines sympathized with the *Madres*, they also desperately wanted stability after seven years of military rule. Like Alfonsín's government, they sensed that some level of compromise with the military would be necessary to prevent another coup.

In another attempt to satisfy the military and the *Madres* Alfonsín passed a decree that enacted two controversial laws: it allowed the relatives of persons reported missing from 1974-79 to be declared dead and to receive financial reparations. Some of the *Madres* saw this as an attempt to close the chapter on their children and most of them refused it indignantly, even doubling the intensity of their protests.³⁷ The *Madres* continued to condemn what they saw as half-hearted attempts at justice by presidents Raúl Alfonsín and Carlos Menem. The widely-publicized CONADEP hearings were revealed to have little political or legal weight, and confirmed the disappearance of only 8,960 of the estimated 30,000 *desaparecidos*. Many of the *Madres* were dissatisfied with the hearings that only recorded human

³⁷ It was this law in part that led to the split of the *Madres* into two groups in 1986. Some of the *Madres* saw the reparations as an acknowledgement of the government's wrong-doing while others saw it as an attempt to close the door on justice for *los desaparecidos*.

rights violations but did not seek to identify those responsible and had no power of subpoena.³⁸

The passion with which the *Madres* have continued their protests up to the current year, 2007, has both impressed and frustrated many Argentines. The *Madres'* refusal to compromise on the issues of trials or reparations, or even to publicly concede that their children are dead, has put them at odds with several democratic administrations. Although their actions have been heroic on several levels, their intransigence on these issues and others has complicated their reception by the Argentine public. This ambivalence is captured in distinct forms through the different representations of the *Madres* in film. The choices of casting and shooting in each narrative also reflect the mixed feelings that many Argentines experienced towards the *Madres*.

D. Subjectivity and Voice

Among the many examples that the *Madres* have left us, their ability to help each other gain agency and speak “truth to power” have been powerfully recorded in film. All of the films analyzed in this chapter narrate the growth of female subjectivity and voice within the context of a patriarchal, Catholic culture in which women’s public voices traditionally have been silenced. The construction of women as submissive and obedient under the paradigm of *marianismo* has discouraged many

³⁸ The hearings were televised for five months in Argentina and compiled in a 1985 book, *Nunca más: Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (Never Again: The National Commission on Disappeared People)*, was an instant best-seller in Argentina (Fisher 130-131). The introduction to the report explains that many families of *desaparecidos* did not come forward because they feared reprisals. Thus, the numbers of confirmed cases were believed by the Commission to be much higher than 9,000 published in *Nunca más*.

women from speaking up, even into the twentieth century.³⁹ The injunction by many Catholic clergy that the *Madres* go home and pray for the *desaparecidos* has been recorded in dozens of testimonials as well as the films *La historia oficial* and *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*. The words of one Catholic official have come to embody the Church's callous attitude towards the *Madres* (and more generally, its rebuke towards outspoken women). "The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo pervert the role of the mother. I can't imagine the Virgin Mary yelling, protesting, and planting seeds of hate when her son, our Lord, was torn from her hands'"⁴⁰ (*Madres'* monthly newspaper, qtd. in Bouvard 184). As discussed in the first chapter, at least some of the ambivalence of Argentines towards the *Madres* can be attributed to these paradigms.

While the Church and the dictatorship sought to divide the *Madres* from each other, the women fought this by pledging solidarity more tightly and using strictly democratic organizational principles.⁴¹ From the beginning one of the founders of the group, Azucena Villaflor, who subsequently was disappeared in 1977, argued that

³⁹ Testimonies in Fisher and Mellibovsky, as well as my own interviews with *Madres* support this.

⁴⁰ This quotation has also been attributed alternatively to an army captain and to a Church official, Mons. Quarracino, by several different sources. As I have discussed in other sections, such attitudes do not reflect the position of all Catholic clergy. Uncounted numbers of clergy worked for the release of the *desaparecidos* at great cost to themselves and sometimes their safety. Two French nuns were among those disappeared with Azucena Villaflor, Esther Ballestrino de Careaga, and María Ponce de Bianco in December of 1977. *Nunca Más* reports that 16 priests were disappeared but these figures are generally considered skewed to the low end.

⁴¹ Several of the *Madres'* practices had the effect of bonding them across difference: One of the earliest tenets of the group was that no *Madre* would be asked about the activities of her disappeared child. This served to keep their focus on finding the *desaparecidos* and kept the *Madres* from factious infighting about their children's political alliances. When the police tried to isolate the *Madres* by arresting them individually in demonstrations, the *Madres* insisted that all of them be taken to jail. The practice of foregrounding the case of all the *desaparecidos*—rather than individual ones—also served to keep the focus on the larger problem and its communal solution. One of the three *Madres* who was disappeared in 1977, Esther Ballestrino de Careaga, had actually recovered her own daughter alive (whom she sent to Brazil for safety), and had returned herself to Argentina to continue to march with the mothers of other *desaparecidos*.

they should form a group because they would be more powerful together than separate.⁴² Numerous testimonials by *Madres* recount how their inclusion in the larger group of women gave them the strength to speak out and to continue a fight that so often seemed hopeless and isolated. The process by which these *Madres* made themselves into subjects and found their voices of resistance is rooted in their relationships with other women (not always *Madres* themselves). This pattern is captured in all the films I review here and suggests a dynamic that challenges Foucault's notion of how subjects are constructed by society. Foucault argues that "discourse constitutes the objects of knowledge, social subjects and forms of 'self,' social relationships and conceptual frameworks."⁴³ Foucault's approach is in keeping with the twentieth century focus on the production of subjectivity (through discourse, ideology and language), as opposed to the Enlightenment notion that the individual produces his/her own consciousness. While Foucault's theory certainly has relevance here—many of the *Madres* describe how they had to overcome their socialization towards submissiveness—Foucault neglects the role of emotion and relationships in the development of subjectivity.⁴⁴ The female characters in all of the films, including the documentary, are powerfully shaped by their relationships with other women, through whom they encounter their own voices. While Foucault acknowledges that a person's consciousness and subjectivity are shaped by their interactions with the world, he is more concerned with "larger" forces like ideology and public discourse. As these films demonstrate the *Madres* rooted their own transformations in much "smaller" events—in friendship, in solidarity, in shared grief and hope. Emotional

⁴² She even anticipated her own death in insisting that the group continue if she were disappeared.

⁴³ Fairclough 39.

⁴⁴ "subjectivity": that which concerns "the active mind or thinking agent" Williams, 308.

relationships with other women are seen as germane to the birth of their voices of protest.

E. New Latin American Cinema: Third Cinema

All six of the directors of these films also have experience in documentary production, which, in this era, grew directly out of the New Latin American Cinema movement that began in the late 1950s. The movement was a response to the growth of populist movements and the violent repression experienced in many Latin American countries. Growing out of Italian neo-realism, the cinema privileged political content over aesthetics. The original movement explicitly rejected “Hollywood’s retrograde commercialism” (Ramsey 266). Several of these films have a distinctly glossy Hollywood finish, *La historia oficial*, *Cautiva* and *Imagining Argentina*, in particular. But none of these three seems to have traded its political message for commercial success which to me suggests a maturing of the initial purist impulse in Third Cinema which claims it was not about making movies as much as “mak[ing] revolution on the ideological level” (Ramsey 266). The economic crises of 1988, which made it clear that Argentine films could not compete in their own country with Hollywood productions, may have moderated this idealism.⁴⁵

The Argentine version of New Latin American Cinema, was based on the work of Fernando Birri, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino -all three of whom were forced into exile during one of the military dictatorships. Birri lived in Brazil during the 1962-64 military period while Solanas and Getino were forced out during

⁴⁵ A historian of Latin American cinema, Timothy Barnard, describes *La historia oficial*’s “bland international style and thematic attention to the Argentine middle class” as indicative of the film industry’s shift towards European and US markets. (*Popular Cinema and Populist Politics* 452).

the latest dictatorship. Birri, who studied with Italian neorealists, is best known for his founding of the Sante Fe Instituto de Cinematografía de la Universidad Nacional de Litoral, which led the way for a new social criticism in popular cinema. Solanas and Getino are best known for their seminal documentary *La Hora de los Hornos: Notas y testimonios sobre el neocolonialismo, la violencia y la liberación* (1968), ‘The Hour of the Furnaces: Notes and Testimonies on Neocolonialism, Violence, and Liberation.’ They also authored the groundbreaking manifesto “Toward a Third Cinema” (1976), which argued not only for a revolution in the content and form of films but in their production and distribution (King 88).

In keeping with its realist tendency, Third Cinema (or New Latin American Cinema) stressed the use of real footage or, at times, re-enactments by actual participants, which can be said of four of the five films in this study. *Imagining Argentina* opens with real footage from the 1978 World Cup in Argentina, one of the most repressive eras of the dictatorship’s tenure. *La historia oficial*, *Imagining Argentina* and *Cautiva*, also fictionalized accounts, use real footage of the *Madres*’ marches as well. A couple of the films mix footage that I can identify as historical with scenes that appear to have been staged and shot in black and white. Viewers can identify the actual historical footage either because they are excerpts from the Lourdes and Portillo documentary or they contain well-known *Madres* or military leaders. While the use of historical reels lends credibility to these fictional pieces, since the footage is not identified with a date or source, it also opens the door for re-enactments which may not deserve the authority viewers may grant them.

PART II: The FILMS

Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (1985)

Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (1985) is one of the few early documentaries on the *Madres* and contains more real footage of their earliest protests than any other documentary on the topic. The film shows the *Madres*' initial steps in transforming their private battles into public confrontations. In many ways the work created a standard of realism against which many of the later fictionalized films would measure themselves. The power of the documentary is that it shows more directly how the *Madres* successfully used their status as mothers to seek help beyond their nation-state. The footprints of Third Cinema can be seen clearly in this work with the camera recording the evolution of the movement in real time.

Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo is the only film in this group that actually interviews the real *Madres*. The narration of their own stories in their own voices is the very process that George Yúdice describes as agency through narration. The fact that the film is the first of its kind about the *Madres* makes its connection to active social change the most vibrant. Testimonial theorist John Beverly argues that testimony is different from art because it is a “means to an end rather than an end in itself” (279). This is primarily what sets *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* apart from the other films in this section. While we can critique the aesthetics of fictionalized films, there is a distinctly living quality to the testimonial film that makes such analyses superficial. When we see cuts of the real *Madres* begging foreign journalists in the Plaza to help them: “Uds. son nuestra última esperanza!” (‘You [all] are our last hope!’) – their desperation is real. Their

voices are quaked with emotion and one can sense the more hesitant ones urging themselves to speak up –even to an unknown reporter in the midst of a chaotic demonstration. They seem fearful, as if the reporter will move on if they don't answer quickly and adequately. If we see female voice as the product of subjectivity, produced in part by sharing narratives, this scene in *Las Madres: the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* appears to record the results of this process. While the *Madres* have not, at this point begun using the rhetoric of “todos son nuestros hijos” ‘all of the disappeared are our children,’ their physical proximity in these shots as well as their tendencies to finish each others’ sentences and use the term “nuestros hijos” ‘our children’ seemingly without awareness, suggest that their subjectivities were becoming enmeshed as they spoke out. Dozens of testimonial and poetic accounts since this documentary have attempted to capture this solidarity and subjectivation in greater detail but none is as eloquent as these very early recordings.

The most impressive part of the documentary is the footage taken in the Plaza de Mayo. Very notable in the opening sequence is the use of a hand-held camera that sometimes wobbles. The microphone is clearly visible and at times the *Madres* jerk it towards them in order to speak. The fact that the *Madres* frequently speak over one another and jostle around the camera crew in a distinctly unchoreographed way contributes to this sense of recording the “real.” In combination with the raw emotion of the desperate women, the early sequences of the film embody almost all the tenets of New Latin American Cinema: the use of real footage, the privileging of content over form, the call to action by the audience (the *Madres* seem to be actually speaking to the viewer at times), and the celebration of grass roots opposition. All of these

components will be imitated in later fictionalized films on the *Madres* and the legacy of this documentary is never far from directors' minds.

In addition to being the earliest piece produced on the women's protests this film is also the one that is most unequivocally sympathetic to the *Madres*. They are positioned at the center of the film, telling their own stories in their own words. They are heroines and martyrs, wholly devoted to the cause of their children. Their narratives are interspersed with footage that is either wholly condemning of the military or is framed to be read that way. One scene has Admiral Emilio Massera explaining that "no hay niños *desaparecidos* ...obviamente algunas de esas personas murieron en la guerra" 'There are no disappeared children...obviously some of those people died in the war...'. First he denies what all the viewers know is true by this point and then tries to cover it up with the overworn excuse that many of the *desaparecidos* died while fighting as *subversivos*. Another clip has General Ramón Campos vilifying the *Madres* in rhetoric that tries to deflect attention from military abuses that had been largely confirmed by the film's release: "estas señoras están continuando la acción subversiva de sus hijo" 'these women are continuing the subversive actions of their children.' He goes on to accuse the *Madres* of colluding with international Marxist organizations.

Other scenes are equally slanted in favor of the *Madres* but with more subtlety. For example, the military is shown beating unarmed citizens in street clashes in several shots. While much of this violence was clearly unwarranted, the narration fails to cite reliable statistics on the number of actual terrorist episodes recorded during the period. It discredits the military's inflated figures of "21,000 terrorist acts,

25,000 *subversivos* and 15,000 combatants” but does not acknowledge there was any social unrest in the period preceding the dictatorship. More recent studies, such as Paul Lewis’ *Guerillas and Generals*, (2002) cite numbers that are significantly lower but still worthy of comment. Lewis’ review of several comprehensive studies of terrorism in Argentina puts the attacks at about one a day from 1971-1973.⁴⁶ The groups held responsible for the majority of the attacks were the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP), the Montoneros, the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación (FAL), and several smaller groups like the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR), the Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas, and the Descamisado Command. The escalation of attacks in the period just before the coup is notable: from 1973-1976 political assassinations quadrupled to 481 and kidnappings almost doubled, to 140. The targeting of police and military officials by these groups is another trend that paints a more comprehensive picture of the violence: of 687 people killed in guerilla attacks from 1969 to 1975, 523 were police officers and soldiers (Lewis 51-53). The documentary’s implication that military violence came out of nowhere does not accurately depict the instability that preceded the coup, and thus makes the film less historical and more “persuasive.”

That the film makers, Muñoz and Portillo are hostile to the dictatorship is obvious to any Argentine viewer of this film. It is clearly a story to “persuade or promote” a specific viewpoint --one that is unabashedly sympathetic to them (Renov’s definition qtd. in Pearson and Simpson 143). But for a non-Argentine

⁴⁶ This particular figure is drawn from María Ollier’s study and does not differentiate between kinds of attacks. Other researchers use categories of attacks to characterize the violence that included assassinations, bombings, kidnappings, armed thefts and arson. Lewis uses figures from studies conducted by María Ollier, Guillermo O’Donnell, and María Mayano to draw his conclusions (51-53).

audience with little history of the nation, the film is constructed carefully to convey the sense of an objective historical piece. Since the film is titled and narrated in English and all of the Spanish-speakers are subtitled, we can assume that the intended audience was outside of Argentina. The fact that it was nominated for an Academy Award in 1986 in the category of Best Documentary, Features, and won an Honorable Mention at the Sundance Film Festival that same year confirms that it had significant viewing in the U.S. (Internet Movie Database 2006). Several subtle techniques reveal the film makers' biases. First, the film uses extensive historical footage from what appears to be news archives, carefully documenting the events that lead up to the coup: Juan Perón is exiled, returns triumphantly, dies tragically, power is passed to his second wife, etc. For those unfamiliar with Argentine history, this overview is fairly comprehensive. It spans more than thirty years, hits the major external changes in government, and shows large crowds at almost every significant event, subtly lending the authority of tens of thousands of witnesses. Second, the film appears to give voice to both sides of the conflict: the *Madres* and the dictatorship. It interviews several high-ranking officials, General Ramón Campos and Admiral Emilio Massera, who discredit themselves by making claims that Argentine audiences would know are false. For a non-Argentine audience, however, the two military leaders get the chance to speak, and then the narrator, along with several other witnesses, quickly discredits them. In this way the film may feel as if its aim is to “record or reveal” but it is more accurately to “persuade or promote.” Another detail in which the film omits information that would have produced a more objective analysis is in the statistics of terrorist attacks preceding the 1976 coup. As I have discussed, the narrator is aghast

at the dictatorship's misleading statistics in depicting the number of armed guerrilla groups in a propaganda film made by the regime. But she fails to insert any numbers of casualties from terrorist violence in the years before the coup.

The use of real footage of the dictatorship, itself, also contributes to the sense that this documentary is representing the "real." There are many shots of the dictatorship in various states of performance: the *junta* reviewing the troops, announcing the coup, attending the 1978 World Cup, rounding up civilians in the street. Many of these shots are done from sites below the soldiers, which makes them seem even more menacing.

The soundtrack of *Las Madres: the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* works consciously with the visuals to create the sense that what the military brought was disorder and chaos. Various shots of the military rounding up civilians are paired with the wailing of sirens and a cacophony of jarring noises from the street. Other shots of the military marching in formation or riding in open vehicles with their weapons drawn, are accompanied by brooding, ominous music, which biases the audience against the military.

The distinction between the documentary meant to "record, observe" and one meant to "promote, persuade" is blurred in several ways in this film. The use of archival news footage from the dictatorship era lends a historical authority to the film that distracts from its sympathy for the *Madres*. There are also several scenes which an experienced viewer, most likely an Argentine, could identify as staged --the *Madres* welcoming a tearful new member into their circle, for example. The fact that such scenes would be indistinguishable from the real footage --at least to cultural

outsiders-- problematizes the film's transparency. Finally, the soundtrack is a powerful tool for shaping viewer's opinions around the dictatorship.

The fact that the film contains dramatic footage of the *Madres'* first recorded testimonies should not make it above critique in terms of its reliability. The highly structured nature of the interviews that are interspersed with the more active footage reminds the careful viewer of the presence of an interviewer whose questions have been deleted from the final product. As mentioned earlier the obvious slant towards the *Madres'* versions of events is apparent in several scenes. Philippe LeJeune has noted that consumers of testimonial genres, whether written or filmed, should be especially wary of activists whose lives revolve around a single cause. Such persons are more likely to craft their narrations around that event in ways that may distort certain features of it⁴⁷ (LeJeune 208-209). Apart from the scripted questions, however, *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* did not leave me with the impression of distorted narratives.

My own interviews with several *Madres* in 2005, however, did initially create this impression. The women had told their stories so often and were so invested in the politics that revolved around their stories that they tended to stick to an informally scripted version, highlighting several themes that have gained currency in their political circles. This could also have been an attempt to avoid a more painful, personal account by focusing on the more empowering aspects of political action. As

⁴⁷ The tendency of several foreign academics who have written on the *Madres* to read maternal symbolism into all of their decisions is an example of this. Their choice of *pañuelos*, for example – which were originally cloth diapers saved from their children's infancy—was originally a practical way for the women to identify each other in large crowds. The fact that they used cloth that was connected to their children was somewhat accidental. It was chosen because all of the *Madres'* knew that all the mothers would have saved one as a keepsake so there would be no question of have to acquire them (Interviews with *Madres* 2005).

I got to know several of the *Madres* more closely -over a series of interviews- they tended to open up more and speak more authentically about their experiences. Matilde Mellibovsky, whom I interviewed twice in her home in Buenos Aires, was perhaps the most revealing in her accounts. She ended one long session by commenting on the impossibility of putting into words the loss that she had experienced with the disappearance of her daughter, Graciela, 29 years ago. “No te puedo contar lo que me ha costado la desaparición de mi hija.” ‘I can’t tell you what the disappearance of my daughter has cost me.’⁴⁸

Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo also reflects the powerful private/public divide that the *Madres* had to bridge in justifying their public protest of “private” family matters. Footage of the *Madres*’ demonstrations in the early years is interspersed with interviews of surviving *Madres*, about ten years after the beginning of the dictatorship. While all of the shots of the marching *Madres* are outside, the later interviews are all inside, apparently in their homes, where they relate their personal accounts. The early sequences are painfully raw and public. The women are clearly desperate –almost out of control, begging strangers for help. In contrast, all of the later interviews are in private. The women are interviewed individually, indoors with no background noise, no interruptions, and all of the questions are edited out. The contrast implies that the loss of a child is both private and public. The poignant interviews reveal the individual forms of grief that many *Madres*’ experienced, suggesting that such an experience is an inherently private affair. But then each woman describes why she believes her child was disappeared –

⁴⁸ Graciela Mellibovsky was disappeared on September 25, 1976 at the age of 29. Her mother, Matilde, is the author of *Circulo de amor sobre la muerte* (*Circle of Love over Death*).

generally because of some social activism- and how she first joined the group of *Madres*. The background story that each woman provides places the narrative squarely back in the public.

The documentary approach contrasts with the fictionalized accounts in that it shows how difficult it was for the *Madres* to bring their private grief into the public sphere. The fictionalized accounts tend to skip over this step, and position the *Madres* directly in the Plaza de Mayo. At the same time, they do more thoroughly portray the difficulties that the *Madres* faced in the domestic sphere when they began to act in the public one.

All of the films I reviewed include shots of the *Madres* protesting in the Plaza, confirming that their physical occupation of the Plaza --traditionally a public, political space-- has great symbolic significance. That the *Madres*' protests privileged their identities as mothers --constructed under *Peronismo* and traditional Catholicism as beings whose sacred duty was performed in the home—makes the Plaza a unique place in which the traditional private/public divide is united. As Adrianna Amante argues, it becomes a kind of “home” to the Argentine political narrative and to the new Argentine political family, as defined by the *Madres*' terms.

Since the notion of family and private relationships is intimately connected to that of home, a private space, it is useful to look at how the Plaza de Mayo has itself been constructed as a home in a public space. Adriana Amante argues that the Plaza itself is a kind of “home” to the family of the Argentine nation. Significantly, it is in front of the Casa Rosada ‘the pink house,’ the president’s residence and the seat of government in the Argentine capital, Buenos Aires. Much of the political history of

Argentina has been played out there: from the 1810 independence drive, to the violence of the Rosas dictatorship (1829-1852), to Perón's organization of the workers' movement in 1945, his ousting in 1955, his return in 1973, the expulsion of the Montoneros, the protests during the Malvinas war, and more. The Plaza has been the site of gathering, demonstration, solidarity and violence. It has been marked by many of the significant social and political transformations in Argentine political history, making it into a kind of home, according to Amante: "La Plaza deviene hogar, porque es el lugar en el que están las madres y donde los hijos desperdigados se reencuentran y traen los relatos de sus derivas. Ya se está muy lejos de la concepción de un hogar limitados por las paredes de la casa: el hogar público de las *Madres* abre lo íntimo para inscribirlo en la historia de la patria: la casa familiar se abre a la política." "The Plaza becomes a home because it's the place in which the mothers are and where they reencounter their missing children and bring the stories of their journeys... it's very far from the concept of a home limited by the walls of the house: the public home of the *Madres* opens the intimate to be written into the history of the fatherland: the familial house is opened to the political.' (48) One of the *Madres* I interviewed concurred with its symbolic significance and viewed the Plaza as a place of triumph: "Como si fuera un territorio liberado... es un pedazo de tierra pero es nuestra..." "As if it is free territory... it's a piece of ground but it is ours..." (Mellibovsky).

The Muñoz and Portillo film also comments on the role of patriarchy in the family and the state. Shots of the *Madres* in the square are intentionally interspersed with footage of rigid military processions of the dictatorship. While the *Madres* are

obviously motivated primarily by emotion, pleading desperately with the cameramen to help them find their children, the military clips are formal, reticent, and disciplined. Soldiers are shown marching in formation, in formal dress with parades and flags. Alternatively they are shown fighting street violence with newscasters reporting on the rise in terrorist violence. So, patriarchy defines two types of violence: official violence is framed as a tool employed with reason and temperance, a necessary evil in the face of uncontrolled subversion. In one excerpted propaganda film, the voice-over narration explains the necessity of the regime's actions --in particular the suspension of civil rights-- as an outgrowth of the overwhelming "la subversion y el terrorismo" 'subversion and terrorism.' While the regime's violence in its own propaganda is described as a reasonable, necessary step, the violence perpetrated by the *subversivos* is portrayed as chaotic and disorienting.

Although the *Madres'* early protest scenes are based primarily on emotion, the film appears to intentionally add pieces in which reason is paramount. The father of one of the *desaparecidos* is shown visiting his son's crypt. He has placed a shroud over the coffin, on which is written "asesinado por la dictadura militar por haber querido una sociedad más justa, más buena, más humana" 'killed by the military dictatorship for wanting a more just, better and more humane society.' Several of the *Madres* interviewed in the later years are shown explaining in non-romantic terms why they believe that their children were disappeared. Some were politically active, others volunteered with their church brigade, one was a historian, another human rights worker. Their narrations are surprisingly controlled, free of the weeping and desperation of the early footage. This may be a function of time, but it may also be a

strategic attempt to privilege reason in the narratives of their children, in order to counter the very sensationalist, provocative accounts of the dictatorship's authors. One *Madre*, Renee Epplebaum, speaks directly back to the sensationalist propaganda produced by the regime: “la mayoría de los *desaparecidos* no eran terroristas, no eran guerrilleros. Eran simplemente disidentes ideológicas, que en la Argentina significaba no estar de acuerdo con las ideas, con la política del gobierno militar” ‘the majority of the *desaparecidos* were not terrorists, not guerillas. They were simply ideological dissidents, which in that era in Argentina meant that they were not in agreement with the ideas, with the politics, of the military government.’

The deleterious effect of the regime's violence on the nuclear family is obvious in the tragic losses that the *Madres* narrate. One *Madre* also relates how her husband killed himself rather than live with his grief. But since this is a very early film –released just two years after the fall of the regime—there is little attention to the reconstruction of family that we will see in later films like *La amiga* (1991) and *Cautiva* (2004). That many of the *Madres* experienced new families in their bonds with other *Madres* and with the youths of a new Argentine generation has not yet developed as a narrative. However, we do see the beginning of a trope that will appear frequently in later years –and is present in some of the poetry in chapter one-- that the *Madres* felt that their missing children had given birth to them rather than the other way around. This is articulated by one of the *Madres* in this documentary who explains that her son's compassion for the poor and generosity towards the needy taught her how to live more fully in this world. Although many of their children never gave birth themselves, the rebirth of the *Madres* --ideologically and in some sense,

spiritually-- empowers the familial cycle in a symbolic way. The dictatorship may have separated these mothers physically from their children, but the ideals of the children live on in their mothers, a powerful legacy that the regime cannot control. The sense that the dictatorship could not dominate the nuclear family with its imposition of the nationalist family is a narrative that is just beginning to germinate in this film. It will be developed more thoroughly in future films and testimonies of the *Madres*.

Another brief gesture towards the reconstruction of family is seen in the ending of the film which features groups of mothers marching in other countries to protest their states' violence: El Salvador, Chile, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru and Lebanon. Many of them wear headscarves similar to the Argentine *Madres*, suggesting a solidarity that transcends borders and cultures. Hebe de Bonafini, president of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, makes the point of stressing that the original *Madres* group could never have survived without the support of mothers and human rights groups outside of Argentina. The connection to struggles of other human rights groups in other parts of the world is imitated in *Imagining Argentina* which ends with statistics on the number of disappeared people in other locations and in *Cautiva*, which ends with the line "alguien, en alguna parte del mundo, está desapareciendo" 'somewhere, someone in the world is disappearing!'

Of the five films I examine here *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* is the only one that does not directly address the ambivalence around the *Madres*. It is only hinted at in the film, with the commentary of Ernesto Sábato, a well-known writer who was tapped to head CONADEP, La Comisión Nacional sobre

la Desaparición de Personas (National Commission on Disappeared Persons). Despite his reported distaste for General Videla, and his obvious sympathy with victims of the repression, even Sábato comments in the film that he has grown frustrated by the *Madres'* uncompromising demands. The narration towards the end of the film also notes that, "polls show that most Argentines would rather forget yet the *Madres* still continue to demand trials for all the guilty."

The film was released only two years after the return to democracy so the ambivalence we will see more markedly in *Cautiva* and *La amiga* may have not yet developed. But another part is surely the decision of the film makers to depict the *Madres* as heroines, which may have been a conscious strategy to win support for them from audiences abroad, particularly in North America since the film is narrated in English. Both of the directors are Latin American by origin --Lourdes Portillo from Mexico and Susana Muñoz from Argentina-- but have had significant experience working with the North American film industry. Portillo identifies as a Chicana and trained at the San Francisco Art Institute, while Muñoz has worked on several English-language documentaries.

It seems likely that their international backgrounds influenced the decisions of these film makers to make this film accessible to U.S. audiences. They were careful about the form, narrating it in English and providing subtitles for all of the Spanish dialogue, as well as the content. Although there are shots of Jimmy Carter welcoming Videla to the White House, Carter's administration is later redeemed by an interview with Patricia M. Derian, Carter's Coordinator for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs in the Department of State. Derian, who traveled to Argentina

to investigate the claims of human rights violations, was greatly influenced by the testimonies of the families of the *desaparecidos* and waged an aggressive campaign against the dictatorship.⁴⁹ In addition to Derian's appearance, the influence of international forces is highlighted in the film by the camera work: the original footage of *Las Madres: the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*_marching (circa 1978) was shot by foreign journalists. Audiences hear their voices asking questions of the marching women but they don't see their faces or cameramen. What echoes in the ears of many viewers, however, are the impassioned pleas of the *Madres* to the journalists and, implicitly, to foreign viewers for help. France, Spain and Italy, all of whom had citizens who were disappeared by the regime, put significant pressure on the military government to release their citizens (Szuchman 1997). As described in the first chapter, a Dutch group also became involved in opposition to the regime after visiting tourists formed SAAM, Support Group for the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Bouvard 86-87). Switzerland also confronted Argentina after the disappearance of a Swiss teenager, Dagmar Hagelin, in 1977. Her case was widely covered in the Swiss press and her father recorded his unsuccessful search for her in, *Mi Hija Dagmar My Daughter Dagmar*.⁵⁰ These details are probably familiar to the Argentine viewer but the audience for this film is clearly outside Argentina.

The significance of this documentary to the representation of the *Madres* in films cannot be overstated. It influenced both the form and the content of many later films. Snippets of the actual film appear in *Imagining Argentina* in which the most

⁴⁹ Carter's administration stopped selling arms to Argentina in 1977 as a response to the dictatorship. (Taylor 201).

⁵⁰ As of 1984 the seventeen- year- old had not been located. Witnesses testifying in front of CONADEP report having seen her shot by military in a raid in which she was confused with a wanted "subversiva," María Antonia Berger. (*Nunca Más*, 389)

dramatic audio of the *Madres*' appeal: "Uds. son nuestra "última esperanza!" ('You [all] are our last hope!') is played in the background of real footage of the marching mothers in the opening sequence. Other films clearly mimic the documentary genre of the film trying to simulate its authority with uneven, outdoor lighting, camera work that is unsteady and sound tracks that vilify the dictatorship. The themes that the film introduces also set the stage for later narratives of their story. The blurring of the private/public line, the destabilization of the state-family relationship, the importance of women's relationships, and the growing ambivalence towards the *Madres* are all tropes that are first explored in the Muñoz and Portillo film.

***La historia oficial* (1985)**

The first fictional representation of the *Madres*' story is in the critically acclaimed *La historia oficial*. Released in the same year as the above documentary, it explores many of the same topics in the context of a family drama that drew audiences in large numbers both inside Argentina and abroad. It won the 1985 Academy Award for Best Foreign film in the United States along with numerous other international awards. Although the director, Luis Puenzo, is Argentine, he also has directed for North American audiences (most notably *The Old Gringo*, 1989) and is clearly familiar with Hollywood convention. This is evident in the filming of *La historia oficial*, which relies on several Hollywood conventions including the use of the shot/reverse shot technique and sophisticated attention to the details of lighting and sound. While *La historia oficial* was Luis Puenzo's first full-length feature film he has since directed a documentary about Holocaust survivors living in Argentina,

“Some Who Lived.”⁵¹ Technically *La historia oficial* is a fascinating mix of Hollywood gloss with Third Cinema content and occasional gestures to Third Cinema form. The themes it explores are ones that are also present in *Las Madres: the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* but are developed differently in this fictional format.

Ambivalence towards the *Madres* is prominent in the content and form of *La historia oficial*. The fact that the film does not feature a mother of a *desaparecido* as its main character is perhaps the most telling sign of this ambivalence. Its principle character, Alicia, is a mother, who was not a victim of the repression but whose adoptive child was stolen from *desaparecidos*. In a strange way the film is about the *Madres*' stories but through the eyes of an upper middle-class Argentine mother. In some ways Alicia becomes a stand-in for the *Madres* as she is devoted to her daughter and ends up making some of the same journeys that the *Madres* do –to hospitals, human rights groups, her priest. While she is searching for the origins of her adopted daughter, Gabby, she has to face some of the losses that the *Madres* themselves did: the possibility that she may lose Gabby, a split with her husband, a break with the Church, and a questioning of her own sanity.

Despite these similarities, Alicia is *not* a *Madre de la Plaza de Mayo*. She is married to a powerful man, is upper-middle class, and has the option of ignoring Gabby's biological origins. Her relationship to the audience is stacked in her favor as well: she is attractive, well-coiffed, and very sympathetic. The director, Luis Puenzo, explains that he did this on purpose: “When I began to think about our situation in Argentina, I tried to think of a way to reach seventy or eighty percent of our people, and not just a group of politically enlightened people who didn't need such a film. I

⁵¹ Part of a five-part miniseries by Steven Spielberg, *Broken Silence* (2003)

wanted to make a movie for the majority, for the person like the main character, Alicia, in the movie.” (*Dialogue on Film* 17)

The absence of the *Madres* in this film must be read in light of audience ambivalence about the *Madres* themselves and the communal guilt of the post-dictatorship period. Film critic Timothy Barnard suggests that *La historia oficial*'s release had a “tremendous cathartic effect on a middle-class audience faced with the question of how to deal with the atrocities that had been carried out in its midst, atrocities on such a scale and undertaken with so much active collaboration or passive complicity of ‘ordinary citizens’ that many commentators have compared the period to pre-war Nazi” Germany (*South American Filmography* 64). On the other hand, Aida Bortnik, the author of the screenplay for *La historia oficial*, explains that, “I do believe there were some people who were really unaware of almost everything [that was happening under the dictatorship]” (Meson 31).

Although there are conflicting analyses of how much the average Argentine knew about the details of the repression, director Luis Puenzo believes that some significant portion of the Argentine public had to be educated about the hidden realities of the dictatorship before they could accept the story of a real *Madre* as the center of a film. Because of this the figure of Sara is the closest character that *La historia oficial* has to a real *Madre*, although she is portrayed in the role primarily as an *Abuela*, a strategy that we will see also in the later film, *Cautiva*. Having lost her daughter to political violence, Sara approaches Alicia as a grandmother seeking her missing grandchild. This strategy allows the film to avoid the mixed emotions that many Argentines experienced around the *Madres* and highlights an *Abuela*, whose

mission is much more popular and unproblematic for many Argentines.⁵² In addition, Sara is purposefully unthreatening and humble—it is hard to find fault with her in any way. She is noble in her suffering and quiet, even demure, in her petition that Alicia consider her story. She endures Roberto’s insults as he throws her out of his house, even stopping to kiss Alicia goodbye as she leaves. Her composure and her devotion to finding her missing daughter’s child are qualities that most middle class audiences would admire, although possibly from a distance. On top of this, she is of a lower class than Alicia and clearly aware of this disparity, which makes her less threatening to middle class audiences. Sara exhibits none of the traits that were stereotyped by the dictatorship in the *Madres*: hysteria, terrorist-leanings, mental illness.

Despite her marginalization, Sara (along with several other female characters) plays an important role in Alicia’s transformation. At first an obedient, somewhat submissive wife who has never asked about the origins of her adopted daughter, Gabby, Alicia has been interpellated by patriarchal structures in her home, her job and her social class. A teacher in a boys’ Catholic school, she teaches history from the perspective of the conquerors, oblivious to her dismissal of other voices. The return of her childhood friend, Ana, changes all of this when the women reunite after several years apart. Ana’s description of her torture and rape at the hands of military officials stuns Alicia who begins to wonder if her daughter could be the child of a *desaparecida*. Simulating what Foucault would term a genealogy, she gradually begins to question all that she has taken for granted: her relationship with her

⁵² For more details on the cases of the *Abuelas* and the formation of the *Abuelas* group, see Rita Arditti’s *De por vida: Historia de una búsqueda (Searching for Life: The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Children of the Disappeared)*, 1999. Media coverage of the *Abuelas* in Argentina is uniformly more positive than that of the *Madres*.

husband, her teaching philosophy, her trust in her parish priest, and her own integrity in accepting Gabby without asking questions. Her transformation is evident when she goes to Ana and explains, “Te acuerdas que vos me hablaste de esa gente de que les sacaban los hijos y se les daban a las familias que no preguntaban.....? No pregunté, no pregunté nada, y ahora no se a quien preguntarle.... Roberto me dice que no piense....” ‘Remember when you spoke of the children who were given to families who didn’t ask any questions.....? I didn’t ask any questions. And now I don’t know whom to ask....Roberto tells me not to think about it.’ According to Puenzo, Alicia’s position is meant to embody that of many real Argentines who had no direct experience of the violence during the repression and so they had the luxury of looking the other way. When they should have asked questions they didn’t and now there are new motives (“democratic stability”) for moving forward without examining the violence too closely. Puenzo’s more condemning portrait of Roberto’s –who had more knowledge about the repression during the era—reveals the director’s critique of Argentines who more actively suppressed the truth when their own interests were at risk.

Despite her feelings of impotence, Alicia rises to the challenge, spends the rest of the film asking questions and in the process risks everything that she finds valuable: her husband, her daughter, her friendship with Ana and her job. In the end, however, she finds a new self, who has shed many of her old fears. As she explains to Sara, the *Abuela*: “Yo siempre me había considerado una persona que no le quitaba nada de nadie. Y ahora no se... Siempre había pensado que fui capaz de hacer cualquier cosa para mantener las cosas que quería..... Y ahora, no se.” ‘I had

always considered myself one of those people who never took anything from anyone. And now I don't know.... I had always thought that I would do anything in order to keep the people that I loved... And now, I don't know.' It is Sara's story of losing her own daughter along with Ana's torture that inspire Alicia to seek the truth. She discovers that the truth is even more important than the consequences to her personal life and ends up advocating for women who don't have the strength to do so for themselves. In one scene she explains to Roberto that she brought Sara to their home to see if Gabby could be Sara's grandchild or the missing child of "otra madre que niquiera tiene la fuerza para hacer rondas en la Plaza con un cartel" 'or another mother who doesn't even have the strength to walk circles in the Plaza with a poster.' This dialogue is the most obvious reference to the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in the film. Although they are shown in various scenes marching around the Plaza, Alicia only sees them when she is alone and so she has never verbally acknowledged their existence to anyone. The fact that she refers directly to the *Madres'* protests in this confrontational scene with Roberto is a significant step in her subjectivation. Of all the fictionalized films I viewed for this project *La historia oficial* is the most dramatic and believable depiction of woman-centered transformation.

Since women are central to Alicia's acquisition of subjectivity and voice, it is no accident that scenes of the protagonist bonding with other women are shot as close ups. Frequently the women's bodies are touching and they overlap one another in several shots, suggesting that they share not only space but subjectivity. This is evident at Alicia's high school reunion, in her private moments with Ana, and in her conversations with Sara about Gabby. Since Puenzo intends Alicia to embody much

of the angst of the Argentine nation in the post-dictatorship era, her physical (and emotional) connection to other subjects opens her to a wider audience. As Ismail Xavier notes, Latin American cinema in the 1960s began placing “the female protagonist as a personification of national predicaments or hopes within the historical process.” (Miller and Stam 356). We certainly observe a continuation of this pattern in Alicia in *La historia oficial*.

Another film strategy is the use of close-up shots, which emphasize emotional content. Shots of Alicia in intense conversation with Ana, Sara, Gabby, and even Roberto, reveal her angst and conflict but also her growth as a character as the audience closely observes the nuances of her expressions. Another camera pattern in this film is that Alicia is frequently traveling when she is challenged by disturbing evidence: in a car with a rebellious history teacher, a train with Sara, walking with Gabby when spotted by the *Abuelas*. Alicia’s psychological movement from ignorance to responsibility is captured by motion in this way. Motion is represented as a healthy quality in the film. For example, one of Alicia’s teaching colleagues, Benitez, is non-traditional in his teaching methods, and runs a chaotic but lively classroom. Alicia, on the other hand runs an orderly but dogmatic classroom, where free debate is stifled and hierarchy is enforced.

Doorways play a similar role, symbolizing Alicia’s passage from ignorance of the dictatorship to knowledge of its crimes and her own complicity. In several scenes doorways frame a character as Alicia contemplates the truth of the character’s revelation: her brother-in-law discussing Gabby’s origins, Benitez exiting her rebellious classroom, Sara leaving Roberto’s home. The characters around Alicia *are*

in motion and she must decide whether to follow them –to accept their perspectives-- or remain still --deny them. The most dramatic doorway scene is, of course, when Roberto slams Alicia’s hand in the door jam because she won’t give up the fight for Gabby’s origins. It is the only doorway scene in which Alicia is the one in motion. *She* has decided to pass through this doorway, from ignorance of the dictatorship to knowledge, and then, responsibility. She is finally taking her own steps. Her husband, who has the most to lose by this development, turns to violence –the trademark of the dictatorship-- to stop her.

Two additional camera angles, the bird’s eye view and the obstructed view, further specific themes in *La historia oficial*. An obstructed camera angle often suggests that the character is not privy to all the information they might need. In several scenes Alicia strains to see the truth but her view is intentionally blocked: the elevator door in Roberto’s office is closing as Andrade appears to suffer a heart attack; a nurse at the hospital closes the door as Alicia sees a woman giving birth; the confessional booth blocks the face of her obfuscating priest. These hindrances are intentionally placed to convey the effort that Alicia must exert to reveal the truths, which so many people are motivated to hide.

In contrast, the camera’s use of the bird’s eye view means that the audience is allowed to “hover above the scene like all-powerful gods, ” much like Alicia does when she looks back at the swarming protestors in the square.⁵³ She has just hurried through them to the safety of her husband’s office building and now sips coffee out of a cup and looks several stories down on them. This angle reminds viewers that Alicia

⁵³ According to film scholar, Louis Giannetti, people photographed like this “seem antlike and insignificant” (12).

has a choice about whether she pursues Gabby's origins. She has enough social and economic power that she can choose to ignore the possible connections to the repression or she can dig them up. Clearly Puenzo wants audiences to identify with Alicia, as he has said in interviews, and to follow her lead in seeking the truth about the repression.

This scene is significant because it also captures Alicia's movement from the private to the public. Much like the actual Madres Alicia must move away from the private sphere of her home and school, and into the public one –hospitals, demonstrations, café meetings with Benitez and late night rendezvous with Ana.⁵⁴ As we will see in *La amiga* and *Imagining Argentina*, this movement is disturbing to the males in the films. In *La historia oficial*, Alicia's movement into the public sphere parallels her rising conflict with her husband. As she traces the steps of the original Madres, visiting hospitals, attending demonstrations, and meeting with the Abuelas, her husband becomes more and more agitated. He berates her for coming home late, for wearing her hair loose, and finally, for crossing the private/public divide and bringing the Abuela (grandmother), Sara, into their home. "Sáquele esa vieja de aquí! Sáquele de mi casa... Una trampa. En mi propia casa!" he yells as he storms upstairs. 'Get that old woman out of here! Get her out of my house! A trap –in my own home!'

While her husband is clearly threatened by his wife's foray into the public scene, Alicia also experiences trepidation, as some camera and lighting choices

⁵⁴ The construction of the classroom as a "second home" and the teacher as a "segunda mamá" is one that was consciously promoted by *Peronismo*: "El ámbito para el cumplimiento de esta tarea como transmisora de conocimientos era su casa or la escuela –el Segundo hogar—lugares considerados similares por las características que se les asignaban." 'The environment for fulfilling this role as a transmitter of knowledge was the home or the school –the second home—places considered similar for the characteristics they were assigned.' (Di Liscia 20) This parallel is most obvious in *La historia oficial* in which Alicia is a teacher in a boys' Catholic, state-run school, and in *Cautiva*, in which Cristina is taken from a Catholic school administered by nuns.

capture. Her character is frequently shot rushing from indoor settings --her home, her school, her husband's office-- passing by the outdoor demonstrations of the *Madres*. All of these street demonstrations are loud, confusing and chaotic, in contrast to the indoor scenes where Alicia takes refuge, which are quiet, clean and orderly. In several scenes Alicia is shown rushing through the street to get to some indoor spot, from which she gazes back at the outdoor commotion with concern. Frequently these outdoor scenes are shot under uneven, natural light, which creates a documentary affect as the lighting of all other scenes are carefully controlled. Symbolically and physically the public, political themes of the *desaparecidos* seem to be encroaching on the safe havens of the private world Alicia has created in her physical space and her mind.

Along with her challenge to the private/public division, Alicia's character, much like the *Madres*, also confronts patriarchal dominance in various forms: her husband, her parish priest, the hidden violence in her husband's corporate world, and authoritarian model of her state-run school. Patriarchy's association with violence is shown in any number of scenes that range from subtle, "polite" violence to disturbing, physical attacks. Roberto's demeanor is the most obvious embodiment of this violence, in his interactions with colleagues, his biological family, and most dramatically with Alicia, whom he brutally beats in the final scene. In all of these scenes Roberto's violence is juxtaposed with the gentleness of another character: his mother, his elderly father, or Alicia, whose values tend towards the humanist side.

The figure of Roberto, nebulously aligned with the dictatorship --viewers never understand exactly how he is connected-- is the embodiment of patriarchal

dominance in this film. His disdain for his wife's concern about the origins of their daughter, his verbal violence and eventual physical violence towards her epitomize the dominance of the patriarchal family man. His estrangement from his own biological family, particularly his gentle father, whom he sees as weak and idealistic, also reveals this character.

Alicia gradually challenges Roberto's patriarchal dominance. She asks questions, does her own research, wanders outside her proscribed spheres, and by the end of the film is in full rebellion. Her decision to leave him accomplishes three important things: she refuses to abide by his disdain and his violence; she challenges the very patriarchal basis of the Argentine family --at least one that was artificially structured by nationalist ideology and dismissive of biology; and she refuses to subject her daughter to the lies that she, herself, endured. Although Alicia is not the *Madre de la Plaza de Mayo* in the film, her rebellion is inspired by the *Madres'* refusal to accept the same terms in their own lives.

Alicia's models are found in the *Madres* themselves, as she watches them challenge patriarchy in its institutional form, the state, Alicia gathers the courage to do so at the personal level, in the figure of her husband. The fact that these women, who have such obviously conflicting interests, can see their common oppression and work together is a powerful blow to patriarchal authority which tends to pit women against each other. Roberto senses this danger and reacts in typical machisto style with screams at Alicia to "Sácame esa vieja de aquí. Sácame de mi casa!" / 'Get this old woman out of here. Get her out of my house!' His assertion of dominance in his own house echoes the military's justification of violence in order to "clean house" of

subversives. He also uses the term “loca” to refer to Sara and Alicia in the same dialogue. He chastises Alicia for bringing Sara to the house with, “ Vos está completamente loca!...No tiene necesidad de regalarse a la primera loca que encuentra en la calle!” ‘You are completely crazy! ... You don’ t have to give [our daughter] away to the first nut you see on the street!’ The term “loca” is a direct reference to the military’s campaign to discredit the Madres’ protests as the work of a bunch of “crazies.” Roberto’s use of this term in a very intentional way –slandering Alicia and the Madres with one phrase—reveals his ideological sympathies for the dictatorship. His later violence reveals the misogyny that lurks beneath his attentive demeanor in some scenes, and parallels the dictatorship’s ultimate violence towards the Madres .

Roberto’s violence, which also symbolizes the wider state’s repression, is a disturbing theme in the film, which starts out portraying Roberto as a devoted family man. As the film progresses, however, we see that Roberto’s investment in his career, his social standing, and his family position, are all deeply implicated in the violence of the military regime. As Alicia begins to question the paradigms that have structured these roles the two struggle for their very survival. The lighting in such scenes conveys the tension this provokes as well as the fear involved in revealing the truths behind the dictatorship. Alicia’s glaring encounters with evidence of the dictatorships’ crimes are shot in bright outdoor lighting: the literature teacher’s story and the Madres’ protests. Other scenes that hint at the legacy of the violence are also shot in bright lighting: Roberto’s father’s exposé on morality and the Abuelas

observing Gabby leaving her day care center. The director, Luis Puenzo, reverses the traditional light/dark symbolism as if to say that the hidden truths of the era must be illuminated. They must be examined honestly and openly, not hidden in darkness.

Similarly, scenes in which Alicia tries unsuccessfully to unearth the truth are shot in dim light. When Alicia seeks information about Gabby's origins from uncooperative people, such as her husband, Roberto, and her Catholic priest, the scenes are dark. Significantly even a victim of the repression, Ana, refuses to help Alicia find Gabby's origins, despite her own condemnation of the regime. Presumably Ana still fears for her own safety and their heated discussion takes place at night, in a store that is closed for business. Sara's testimony to Alicia about Gabby's origins is shot in a very dim arcade, relegated to dark corners of Argentine society. The secrecy that shadows Alicia's most intimate relationships—with her husband, her best friend, her parish priest, and her child's potential grandmother—is critiqued through the lighting strategies.

Sound is another component that contributes to the impact of these films. High-pitched noises are generally unsettling to viewers, for whom deeper tones are more calming (Giannetti 192-3). Such variations allow a director to manipulate how audiences experience a certain scene. In *La historia oficial*, for example, Alicia's psychological discomfort at being in the street while a large human rights group is protesting the kidnappings is heightened by a wave of strident sounds from passing traffic. When combined with Puenzo's choice of uneven, natural lighting, the scene looks and feels as if it could be from authentic news reels.

In another highly symbolic scene, young Gabby's room is invaded by her older, male cousins who are brandishing toy guns and roughhousing. They burst into her quiet room in a wave of high-pitched laser noises, shouting, and jostling. Gabby had been putting her doll "daughter" gently to bed and singing softly, and the invasion startles her so drastically that she begins cowering and sobbing. The contrast of her quiet existence to the jarring cacophony of the "soldiers" invading her room captures some of the disruption that the families of the *desaparecidos* experienced in having their relatives taken from their homes.⁵⁵

The music in *La historia oficial*, while rarely the focus of a scene, contributes much to the film's commentary on historical memory and the distortions of the dictatorship. The film, set in March, 1983, in the final months of the dictatorship, opens with the Argentine national anthem playing in the schoolyard. All of the teachers and students obediently mouth the words about "libertad, libertad, libertad" which none of them has enjoyed for almost seven years. The irony is not lost on Argentine viewers, many of whom would identify with such public performances of patriotism. The next song, "El país de no me acuerdo," is innocently sung by Gabby while playing in the bathtub. The narrative is about a fantasy world in which people have no memories and so wander aimlessly repeating their mistakes – an obvious argument for the preservation of accurate historical memory. The song is woven into the background of several scenes in the film, sometimes without words and with different instrumentals, but it gently reminds viewers of the dangers of such a country. In a reunion scene that will change Alicia's life, she rejoins her friend, Ana, who is playing the song "Yesterday," on the piano. The song's lyrics romanticize the

⁵⁵ 62% of *desaparecidos* were taken from their homes, according to research in *Nunca Más* (29)

past as a place of hope and the present as one of despair. At the end of the piece, Alicia says the title in English, “Yesterday,” to which Ana responds in English, “tomorrow.” The women’s different choices of words suggest their different relationships to the past: Alicia was comfortable there living in ignorance, while Ana was not --she was tortured and raped under the dictatorship. Now, Ana would like to move forward, while Alicia would rather move back.

While Alicia’s relationship with Ana is pivotal in provoking her search for Gabby’s origins, the focus of the film is really on the impact of Alicia’s rebellion on the nuclear family. In challenging the patriarchal structure of the family, Alicia is also questioning the allegiance of the nuclear family to the patriarchal state. Her deconstruction of the terms “state” and “family” lead her in an unlikely direction. In contrast to the Madres, who are often credited with choosing their children over the state, Alicia does the opposite. She does not chose Gabby over the state but chooses the “family” of the nation over her smaller, biological family. She sees that the redemption of the nation for the crimes of the repression will have to come from honesty about the period. Ironically, she circles back to the dictatorship’s construction of the “national family” as one whose well-being overrides that of the biological family, but with an important distinction. She embraces the “national family” in terms which she has defined for herself, with the help of others: historical integrity, accountability, and human rights. These are terms for which she will sacrifice --she may lose her daughter and husband. She will not sacrifice for abstractions like “nation” and “family” that are constructed on the basis of her silence and complicity with violence.

Many critics have observed the centrality of the mother figure in *La historia oficial*, and her role as protector of the family against the intrusions of the state. Sczuchman, for example, explains that, “When the challenge to family integration arises, a female is presented as the foil. She represents the relentless force that will have its way regardless of consequences, and she is the agent of blows to the social conventions“ (186-7). However, if we look at the specifics of *La historia oficial*, the female “foil,” Alicia, is in a more complicated position than the *Madres*. The “state” that she must condemn is embodied in the person of her husband. The attack on her family does not come from an outside source, but an inside one, her own conscience. Her campaign is for the integrity of her family --that they acknowledge the truth about her daughter’s origins-- not simply its maintenance. In order to achieve this, she must confront many issues: first her own ignorance of the repression and her complicity, as well as her earlier tolerance for her husband’s dominance. Then she must confront her husband himself, which shakes her entire foundation. This dynamic complicates the stereotypical “family vs. the state” conflict that is frequently associated with the *Madres*’ struggle, but is probably more relevant to viewers of the film without a direct, personal experience of the repression.

Clearly the director, Puenzo, has this in mind when he casts Roberto as a domineering, manipulative husband. When Alicia asks too many questions, he waves her off like a child, bopping her playfully on the head with a balloon when she asks very serious questions about Gabby’s origins. Puenzo confirms that he envisioned Alicia and Roberto’s marriage as a microcosm for the kind of authoritarian dominance that created the military dictatorship:

“ [authoritarianism] begins in the home, in the relationships between men and women, parents and children.....the wife or the son as property.....In my movie the political things begin in the relationships” (“Dialogue on Film” 18).

One of the greatest accomplishments of the *Madres'* activities was that they created an active, public discourse around these questions of family, state, and patriarchy. Once Alicia is able to begin asking these questions about her own life she is able to wrestle these terms back --from her husband, and symbolically from the dictatorship-- then she is able to make her own decisions and claim agency that is rooted in subjectivation (Foucault). The fact that the *Madres'* courageous protests contributed significantly to Alicia's acquisition of voice is a triumph that should not be overlooked. Several critics of the film, such as Tamara Falicov decry the attention that the film pays to Alicia, a privileged and initially, ignorant character (7). But her evolution in this film is a powerful one and the careful viewer will see that its dependence on the *Madres'* model is a central message of the film.

***La amiga* (1988)⁵⁶**

The 1991 film *La amiga* has a number of elements that make it unique among the films about the *Madres*. First, *La amiga* is the only fictionalized film whose central character is the mother of a *desaparecido*, and who eventually joins the protests of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*. Liv Ullmann, a Norwegian actress plays María, who loses her activist son to the violence. The film is also the only fictionalized film that is directed by an Argentine woman, Jeanine Meerapfel, who

⁵⁶ The release date of this film is uncertain. Various citations refer to dates from 1988-1992 and all of them have a question mark after the date. I am using 1988 here as this is the date cited on the director's website.

was born in Argentina to German parents fleeing the Holocaust.⁵⁷ Meerapfel has produced several documentaries that address the connection between Germany and Argentina and her German roots are revealed in *La amiga* as Raquel's parents are German Jews. In a reversal of WWII patterns, she flees to Germany during the Argentine repression.⁵⁸ Finally, *La amiga* is the only film that truly explores the powerful ambivalence that Argentine audiences experience around the *Madres'* protests. This ambivalence is eloquently captured in the conflicted relationship between María and Raquel, childhood friends who make different choices about how to fight against the repression. The juxtaposition of the two women also explores the construction of female subjectivity through relationships and emotion.

While María stays in Argentina and joins the *Madres* after her son, Carlos, is disappeared, Raquel flees to Germany after her workplace is bombed and her life is threatened. The characters of María, the *madre*, and Raquel, her childhood friend, rely heavily on each other to construct their individual subjectivities. They have been confidantes since elementary school and still share the details of their adult lives with each other. They make each other into subjects by listening to each other's stories – a dynamic that many testimony theorists, such as George Yúdice, have emphasized.⁵⁹ This process is not without serious conflict, however, as Raquel criticizes María for devoting her life to her son's death. In numerous scenes Raquel's character urges

⁵⁷ Film scholars more concerned with production and distribution issues might argue that Meerapfel should not be considered an Argentine director in the case of this film as she returned to Germany as a young adult to teach at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne, and relied on German funding for *La amiga*. See King, 93 for details of the funding.

⁵⁸ Meerapfel's 1994 work, *Oro nazi en Argentina (Nazi Gold in Argentina, 1994)*, deals with the possible laundering of valuables from the Third Reich through Argentine bankers. Her 1989 documentary, *Desembarcos -- When Memory Speaks*, chronicles a film workshop on the dictatorship that she conducted in Buenos Aires.

⁵⁹ George Yúdice is among them.

María to end her vigil for the *desaparecidos*. Raquel appeals to María to let go of the past for her psychological health: “los muertos tienen que tener un lugar. Nosotros tenemos que tener un lugar para donde pudiera llorar” ‘the dead have to have a place. We have to have a place to go to be able to cry.’ She argues that María is alienating many people who care about her: “Vas a quedar sola, sola como un perro. Y esta vez no te voy a acompañar.” ‘You are going to end up alone, alone like a dog. And this time I’m not going to stay with you.’ Finally she stoops to the lowest critique of the *Madres*, which was quite common among their detractors: “Vos siga explotando la muerte de su hijo!” ‘You keep exploiting the death of your son!’ All of these charges are ones that have circulated in public discourse around the continuation of the *Madres*’ campaign long after the fall of the dictatorship. They would have been familiar tropes to any Argentine who followed the news by 1991 when the film was released. That audiences would have witnessed the *Madres*’ struggles with the administrations of Alfonsín and Menem, and the bitter backlash that these produced in some quarters, speaks to the ambivalence that Raquel’s character brings to the narration of María --and the *Madres*--’ story.

But even such rifts in the women’s relationship further the subjectivity of both women. To reconcile, Raquel is forced to confront her own inability to understand her friend’s pain or her strength. Likewise, María has to search for the words to describe her own transformation through the experience of losing her child, and being reborn: “Yo fui parida por mi hijo.” ‘My son gave birth to me.’⁶⁰ Through claiming their

⁶⁰ This is a phrase that is commonly used by the *Madres* who are still active. It has been attributed to Hebe de Bonafini several times and is now frequently used by various *Madres* as part of a larger rhetorical strategy.

own emotional/spiritual locations, both women grow into subject positions that they had not occupied before.

The ending of *La amiga* suggests a thoughtful compromise to the ambivalence of much of Argentine society with the *Madres'* continuing campaigns. Raquel, an actress who had once hoped to depict the *Madres'* story on stage, admits to María that she has been unable to put herself into the role. She confesses that the *Madres'* experiences are so profound, so tragic, and so heroic, that they are beyond her comprehension: “no te comprendo, ni siquiera puedo empezar. Vos es demasiado fuerte” ‘I don’t understand you. I can’t even begin to. You are too strong.’ Raquel’s reconciliation with María allows audiences to experience their ambivalence towards the *Madres* with less guilt and more compassion. They may still feel impatient with the *Madres* at times but might view the *Madres* with more tolerance. To understand the mind and heart of a *Madre*, one has to have walked in her shoes. *La amiga*’s willingness to expose the ambivalence that so many Argentine audiences experience around the *Madres* is one triumph of this film that is not accomplished by *La historia oficial* or *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*.

Another victory for this film is the way in which it tackles the complex issues of patriarchal dominance, as present in the family and the state. Patriarchal violence in *La amiga* is embodied by the military figures that kidnap María’s son and murder a young woman as María looks on. Several scenes depict María and the other *Madres* being harassed and roughed up by police and military officials. Her refusal to be bullied, along with the other *Madres*, simulates the courage of the original group, who endured threats, arrests and the murder of three of their earliest members. One scene

in *La amiga* captures this boldness in dramatic form. When armed officers are told to aim their weapons at the protesting, unarmed mothers in the square, their superior officer orders them to “Apunten!” (‘Aim!’), the women stand their ground and shout back, “Fuego!” (‘Fire!’)

The *Madres*’ new roles as public actors, protesting and even confronting armed guards in the Plaza upended their private lives. For some of them this development disturbed their male family members, much like Roberto in *La historia oficial*. In *La amiga*, María’s husband, Pancho, is perhaps the least patriarchal character in this set of films. His temperament and support reflect the testimonies of the real *Madres* who reported their husbands to be generally encouraging of their protests.⁶¹ Despite this, Pancho is shown to be disturbed by his wife, María’s, absence from their home. When she returns from a demonstration where she is beaten and arrested, Pancho is furious. He complains that the house is a mess, their daughter is neglected, and he has no clean clothes. The wall outside their home has also been spray painted with the words “Madre de Terrorista” ‘Mother of a Terrorist,’ a symbolic invasion of the private sphere by the public.⁶² In another scene Pancho is forced from his own living room when the *Madres* gather there in a group, working and laughing in solidarity. He is bothered by the *Madres* on two levels: María’s insistence on making her grief public, which is encouraged by these women; and his own exclusion from a group whom he resents for invading his home. He wants to mourn in private and move on –“lo que está hecho está hecho” ‘what’s done is done.’

⁶¹ “I can tell you that I began this fight and kept it up because of the support I got from my family because I don’t know if I would have been able to do it alone. My husband always backed me up, and so did my sons” (Vazquez in Mellibovsky 101-102).

⁶² As noted earlier, “mother of a terrorist” was a common insult used by the dictatorship to stigmatize the *Madres*.

⁶³ Or perhaps he wants to maintain his patriarchal position in his home and the insularity of his private grief.

María and Pancho's most serious rift, however, centers on their distinct methods of dealing with the loss of their son. While María continues to demonstrate and will not admit that Carlos is dead, Pancho wants "algo, María, una tumba por lo menos, unos huesos, algo que me diga que está muerto" 'something, María, a grave at least, some bones, something that tells me that he is dead.' His desire for a rational, orderly progression to his son's death contrasts with his wife's desire for justice, which comes at a greater emotional cost to her: she has to publicly refuse to admit his death, while facing a very different reality in private. Patriarchal privileging of reason over emotion can be read as a factor in Pancho's preference for psychologically burying his son. María's insistence on maintaining the public position that los desaparecidos are not dead—a position that the real Madres employed-- significantly increases her discursive power by refusing to close the door on the injustices of the era.

But patriarchy does not divide María and Pancho the way it does Roberto and Alicia in *La historia oficial*. Instead, its legacy of violence is visited symbolically on the family of their son's abductors. In one of the last scenes of the film María recognizes the officer who ransacked her house looking for her son, presumably his killer.⁶⁴ The military man is seated at a table with his attractive wife and young children when María walks over and places an empty chair at their table. No words

⁶³ "what's done is done."

⁶⁴ This was not an uncommon occurrence in the years after the repression, according to reports from survivors of the regime. Because of the amnesty laws many torturers lived, and continue to live, freely in Argentina.

are spoken but Maria and the officer recognize each other and the symbolism of the empty chair lingers over his bright, young family as María exits the restaurant. Her own family is shown to be as whole as it can be given their loss, with her second son's wife just having given birth to a son, whom they name Carlos in memory of their lost brother. Although Carlos' return is only symbolic, the preservation of María's family in the face of patriarchal violence is shown as a triumph.

In addition to its careful execution of camera work, the soundtrack of *La amiga* also contributes to the film. It comments on the private/public dissolution, juxtaposes the secrecy of the violence with the apparent normalcy of many Argentines and highlights the omnipresence of propaganda in the era. First, the dissolution of the private / public barrier is captured by allowing external sounds to intrude on very private scenes. When María and Pancho go through their missing son's shack prominent sounds from chickens, a neighbor's television, traffic and dogs intrude on a painful family experience. The intrusions connote the poverty in which Carlos had chosen to live (presumably for political reasons as his parents are middle class and comment that they don't understand why he was living in La Villa). But they also suggest the destruction of the private family sphere that the kidnappings embodied. As his parents pick through his shattered belongings their silent glances at each other speak volumes but they are not spared the cold sounds from outside the shack.

In another scene Raquel is leaving for exile in Germany after death threats and an attack on her life while the streets of the city are awash in the sounds of Argentina's 1978 World Cup celebrations. María and Raquel are baffled that the

people dancing in the streets with Argentine flags seem oblivious to the violence in their midst, and the sounds of their celebrations dominate the women's goodbyes.

The music in *La amiga* has a similar impact. Numerous scenes are accompanied by music that is mismatched with the emotional content. This conveys the sense that the characters experience a disconnect between their knowledge of what is happening secretly in their country and the oblivion, or denial, in which the surrounding world appears to function. This contrast is also accomplished by the sounds of official propaganda streaming forth from radios and televisions in several key scenes. In one, as police barge into María and Pancho's home looking for Carlos, official propaganda on TV can be heard promising a return to peace and stability with the arrival of the dictatorship: " hoy vuela la paz a nuestra tierra" 'today peace returns to our land.'

Several of the *Madres* whom I interviewed in Buenos Aires lavished praise on *La amiga* without prompting. Many of them had met Liv Ulmann personally when she traveled to Argentina to do research for the role. The *Madres* seemed moved by her attention in interviewing them about their experiences and the quality of her performance. I consider this to be the ultimate compliment since these same *Madres* were not shy about harshly criticizing several testimonial writers with whom they had worked.

Within this context I have one critique of the film, which bears mention: María's relationship with the other *Madres* is hardly acknowledged. She is shown meeting with them and marching in the Plaza, but there are no scenes of her integration into the group or sharing of her personal story. As Farrah Anwar argues

in *Sight and Sound*, the film does not explore the strength that María derives from their solidarity, a crucial component in understanding the group's power. I agree with Anwar's analysis and notice that this follows a cinematic trend of not representing the inner workings of the *Madres'* group. We see this in *La historia oficial*, *Cautiva* and *Imagining Argentina*. While we can attribute this in part to an avoidance of the controversies that have swirled around the *Madres'* protests, I suspect that this reluctance to portray the *Madres* as fictional characters is based on trepidation. The *Madres* have gained an almost mythical status in Argentina and have so thoroughly represented themselves—in written and oral testimonies—that trying to capture such experiences is intimidating to any director. The fact that Raquel, a highly acclaimed actress in *La amiga*,² cannot find theatre work portraying a *Madre* is a hint of this reluctance. As the last of the *Madres* die, however, I suspect we will see more attempts at narrating their stories in fictionalized films. In the mean time *La amiga* is certainly one of the richest fictionalized films about the *Madres'* experiences that exists.

Imagining Argentina (2002)

Imagining Argentina is the only film made in English, clearly for a North American audience that knows very little about the history of Argentina. It is unique in reversing the gender roles that the *Madres'* protests embodied, by placing a male character in the *Madres'* protests while having the state disappear his outspoken journalist wife. *Imagining Argentina*, set in 1976, is also the only film whose director has no documentary credits, nor any obvious links to Argentina. Christopher Hampton has a long list of Hollywood credentials, primarily as a writer for such

blockbusters as *Dangerous Liaisons*, *The Quiet American* and *The Secret Agent*, among others. He was born in Portugal to British parents, and the cast is also drawn from European origins: Emma Thompson is British, and Antonio Banderas is Spanish (The British Films Catalogue). This background may explain why the film has the most Hollywood gloss of all the fictionalized films in this study. Much like *La historia oficial*,⁶⁵ these aesthetics do not detract from the integrity of the *Madres*' stories. The scenes in which the *Madres* explain to Carlos the circumstances of their missing children have a distinctly testimonial quality. The women's faces are shot very close, filling the whole space of the screen, emphasizing their emotion. Flashbacks to their children's abductions are narrated by Carlos in the Voice-of-God style, very similar to that in the documentary, *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*.⁶⁵

Much like *La historia oficial* and *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*, *Imagining Argentina* makes similar observations about the public/private split. Carlos rebukes his wife, Cecilia, for bringing the subject of the *desaparecidos* into the home. But Cecilia explains that the seemingly "public" problem of political violence is equally a private one: "Those children were Teresa's age! Suppose it happened to Teresa? Are you telling me that I'm not allowed to talk about these things in my own home...?" Cecilia's work as a journalist embodies the blurring of the public and the private as she writes columns that challenge the dictatorship's power. After Cecilia is, herself, disappeared Carlos holds himself responsible for not defending the

⁶⁵ *Cinéma Vérité*, the American and French documentary movement in the 1960s was hostile to the narrator who spoke in the background of documentary footage, arguing that it prejudiced the viewers' interpretation of the visuals (Giannetti 325). Portillo & Muñoz seem to have no reservations about this structure, however, as their narration of *Las Madres* is markedly slanted towards the *Madres*.

public/private barrier: “I should have stopped her writing those things.” But his daughter seems to understand that the destruction of the private/public split is one that is connected to justice and possibly rooted in gender. In maturity beyond her teenage years she replies, “You couldn’t have stopped her. It’s what she does.” It is possible that her position as a female gives her insight to her mother’s behavior that her father seems to lack.

The main female character in *Imagining Argentina* resembles Alicia in *La historia oficial* in that she asks a lot of questions. In fact, Cecilia explains that: “I said that I wanted to be a journalist so I could ask people difficult questions.” The difference between the two women, of course, is that Cecilia asks the questions during the repression while Alicia asks them after. This difference should be contextualized, however by the, audience and time of the films. *La historia oficial* was made for an Argentine audience and released just shortly after the fall of the regime when many Argentines were still learning the details of the violence, a process that the director says he wanted to facilitate with the sympathetic character of Alicia. In contrast, *Imagining Argentina* was made more than fifteen years later for an English-speaking audience for whom the heroic character of Cecilia would probably not seem one-dimensional, as she might for Argentines with more historical knowledge.

Although Cecilia’s character is outspoken from the start, she is drawn into the *Madres’* story through their courage. In this way she resembles Alicia in *La historia oficial*. After seeing them marching in the Plaza, Carlos discourages her from writing

about their plight but she protests “If those women in the square have the strength to speak out, shouldn’t I?”

Like Pancho in *La amiga*, Carlos is a highly sympathetic male character who is supportive of his wife, but is nonetheless alarmed by her movement into the public sphere. In *Imagining Argentina*, the illusion that a private space really exists at all is shattered by Cecilia’s writings and her insistence that their daughter could just as easily be disappeared. In both cases it is women who are shown to move more fluidly between the private and the public. In all of the fictionalized films in this study men are shown to preserve the divide because it defends some actual privilege they enjoy or some belief –usually erroneous—that they can defend their private space against the state.

Carlos’ illusion is short-lived in *Imagining Argentina* as his wife and daughter are both disappeared by the dictatorship. Carlos then becomes the “madre” figure in his search for them. Although he is not physically female, his sensitivity and his artistic tendencies, make him into the stereotypically feminine figure –implicitly, the *madre*-- in the story. I have mentioned that Argentine audiences would find this leap difficult to make but I think non-Argentines may find it plausible if they are sufficiently ignorant to details of the *Madres*’ group. The fact that the group did not allow men to participate, in part because of the Astiz betrayal, is a point that might have been lost on non-Argentine viewers.⁶⁶ The contrast of Carlos’ character with other male figures in the films I review is striking. While Roberto (*La historia oficial*) and Cristina’s father (*Cautiva*) are aggressive, independent patriarchs, Carlos’

⁶⁶ The infiltration of the group by Alfredo Astiz, who posed as the brother of a *desaparecida*, was a brutal blow to the early *Madres*. Really a military spy, Astiz is believed to have orchestrated the disappearance of three *Madres* in 1977 (*Página 12*).

character is on the surface more gentle and emotional. His ultimate test comes when he has the chance to kill a military official through the hairs of a rifle, but refrains when the man's daughter enters the sites. The scene contrasts with the violence to which Roberto and Cristina's father are prone. Carlos is shown to be anguished about his personal losses but refuses to stoop to the level of his torturers, a trope that is present in the *Madres'* writings as well.

Despite some moments of insight *Imagining Argentina* produces fairly formulaic notions of good and evil. The *Madres* and the *desaparecidos* are portrayed as innocent victims and the military is depicted as evil and inhumane. When Carlos asks a military official "What do you think when you see those mothers in the square?" the man replies, "Even animals have mothers." At the opposite extreme the *Madres* stories are portrayed in a more heroic, if simplistic light. Their marches are orderly and quiet (in marked contrast to *La amiga's* depictions, and the *Madres'* own accounts) and no attention is paid to the conflicts and contradictions that most likely existed in their personal lives.

Remembering the English-speaking audience for this film is crucial to understanding its choices about plot and characters. Much like *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*, *Imagining Argentina* is unapologetic in its sympathies for the *Madres*. Also like the documentary, it completely avoids depicting the tensions that surround their activism. In this way the more controversial questions of their campaigns are not unearthed. For primarily foreign audiences the issue of the *Madres'* local reception may be less interesting than the story of their heroism in the

face of tyranny. Also, without sufficient historical knowledge Argentina, such audiences might be lost on the complexities of the *Madres*' cases.

The casting of Carlos as the *Madre*-figure in this story is another move that only non-Argentine viewers could accept. It may be explained as an attempt to cater to US audiences with whom reversals of traditional gender dynamics are popular. Centering the film on an outspoken, independent woman and her artistic, emotional husband may have been playing to a backlash in the U.S. against stereotypical gender roles in film. Although a very awkward substitution for viewers familiar with the history of the real *Madres*, it may work for audiences who are completely unfamiliar with the story. In addition, I am not sure that an American audience would appreciate the truly revolutionary nature of the *Madres*' protest without sufficient historical background on gender roles, the church, and patriarchy in Argentine culture.

If we can look past these circumstances, Carlos' acceptance by the *Madres*' group is the key to his development as a *madre*-like figure. His journey to finding his voice is through accepting his supernatural powers and writing a play that defies the dictatorship's version of the era. In this process it is his relationship with his daughter and with his female colleague, Leslie, that are crucial to nurturing his abilities. Both are supportive towards his gift and his personal struggle even in the face of another colleague's skepticism. His transformation is extraordinary given the disappearances of his wife and daughter. Despite this, he is never completely reliant on the other *Madres* in the way that the real-live women were.⁶⁷ He always has a spiritual gift that

⁶⁷ This is another interesting parallel to *La amiga* in which María some how becomes a leader of *las Madres* but her relationships with individual *Madres* are never developed. Much like Carlos in *Imagining Argentina*, she seems to hover over them. The group seems to be an extension of her energy rather than the reverse.

sets him apart and as male, he is able to confront other males in ways that the *Madres* are not. In fact, Carlos' narrative –he is a playwright and theatre director of some reputation- plants him more squarely in Foucault's analysis of the production of subjectivity through broader social forces like ideology and discourse. Carlos tries to affect these forces through his plays and direct confrontations with his enemies, but relies on human relationships only to a limited extent.

In another parallel to *La amiga, Imagining Argentina* also makes the connection between the Argentine dictatorship and the Nazi repression. Carlos's encounter with the Jewish couple who escaped the violence of Auschwitz is another layer of genealogy for the violence in Argentina. They tell the story of their survival in the concentration camps as all of their friends died around them. The only other survivor was a friend's daughter, whose tongue was cut out to keep her from talking, another gesture to the link between subjectivity and voice. The grown woman now lives with them silently, uncomfortable with strangers, lurking in the shadows. When Carlos does find his artistic voice in his final theatre production he seems to be retelling not just the Argentine drama, but that of the silent victims of the holocaust as well.⁶⁸

The technical aspects of *Imagining Argentina* contribute much to the themes that it develops successfully: the condemnation of the secrecy under which the relatives of the disappeared lived were forced to live, and by extension, the patterns of

⁶⁸ Raquel's character in *La amiga* is an actress who also portrays a prisoner in a Nazi camp during the holocaust. The pattern of holocaust imagery in films and testimonies about the repression is remarkable. Reports that Jews who were disappeared by the Argentine regime were treated worse than other prisoners are common. For a personal account of this see Jacobo Timmerman's *Preso sin nombre, celda sin número* 'Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number'. Several historians have also observed this pattern. See *Lexicon of Terror* (Marguerite Feitlowitz) and *Authoritarian Argentina* (David Rock) for more on this.

obfuscation that still exist around the topic.⁶⁹ At times the lighting patterns are similar to *La historia oficial*, with darkness --both physical and psychological-- hampering the *Madres*' searches for their missing children. All of the clues about Cecilia's disappearance come to Carlos in the dark --he finds her shoe, he envisions her escape, he tracks her to the Germans' farm. These lighting choices convey the sense that Carlos' search is impeded by darkness --the ignorance in which families were kept by the regime. The *Madres* themselves also meet in his garden under the cover of darkness to hear of the fates of their children. All of the direct attacks on Carlos' family take place at night --a brick is thrown through his window, his daughter is taken from his home, his children's theatre is destroyed and his daughter is murdered. The darkness of these scenes heightens the vulnerability and confusion experienced by the relatives of the victims of the repression. But they also provide a striking contrast with the agency and activism that some characters exhibit under such conditions of extreme repression.

In contrast to all of the other films, which do not directly depict the experiences of *los desaparecidos*, *Imagining Argentina* records several scenes of torture and rape experienced by victims. In another example of the reversal of the traditional light/dark symbolism, these scenes are shot in bright light. Cecilia's worst experiences of the repression are all shot this way: her kidnapping from the house, her rape and torture, watching her daughter be taken away for torture. Her bold defiance of her captors is reflected in the bright light in which the scenes are shot, suggesting the agency that she exhibits even under the most extreme conditions.

⁶⁹ These themes are also problematized through lighting in *La historia oficial*, *La amiga* and *Cautiva*.

Several scenes in *Imagining Argentina* switch dramatically from darkness to harsh glare –with a photographer’s flash that fills the entire screen for an instant: just before Carlos envisions his daughter’s murder, before he sees his wife being tortured and before he dreams Cecilia being thrown off of the Casa Rosada (the pink house). They capture the horror that family members must have experienced in envisioning the fates of their own *desaparecidos*. The soundtrack also records the exaggerated noise of a photographer’s flash, simulating that moment when subjects are blinded by the light of a flash. This technique of “overexposure” is often used for nightmare sequences in filming (Giannetti 19).

Imagining Argentina also uses a bird’s eye view to capture the vulnerability of the women being held with Cecilia in a secret camp. The camera looks down on them from an angle that would be impossible for a human being as they walk in an exercise circle surrounded by armed guards. The shot quickly switches to close ups of the women’s tattered garments: some are in torn skirts, others wear only one shoe or are barefoot, some limp with the aid of another woman. Uniformly their faces are strained and exhausted, details that are not observable from the bird’s eye view.

The ending of the film is hopeful, though, with another bird’s-eye shot providing a notable contrast to the earlier one in the camp. As Cecilia and Carlos’ eyes meet across the carnival-like scene in La Boca, Cecilia looks down on him from a perch several stories above the crowds. At the same time the shot switches to Carlos’ play, which he has rewritten with an alternative ending. Instead of being separated forever Euridice and Orpheus are reunited, with a winged Orpheus swooping down to recover his love. Similarly Carlos races up the stairs to Cecilia’s

perch and they are reunited, albeit without their daughter. The scene has a surreal quality to it with the noisy surrounding festivities putting their small reunion in its proper scale. It is also bittersweet, with the unspoken knowledge that the couple's daughter is no longer with them.

The ending of *Imagining Argentina* is somewhat contradictory. At one level it celebrates the triumph of imagination over reason, a trope that was popular in Argentine artistic communities in the post-dictatorship era. While this plot may be a personal and psychological triumph for Carlos its suggestion that artistic imagination is a salve for serious political ills rings a bit hollow. The film stretches itself a bit too far in attempting a Third Cinema move that stylistically contradicts the rest of the film. It closes with lists of the numbers of missing in 12 countries outside Argentina - -from 4,000 to 90,000 missing-- and ends with the words "Somewhere in the world someone is disappearing!"

***Cautiva* (2004)**

Cautiva is the most recent fictionalized film centered around the *Madres* but focused on the children of the *desaparecidos* who embrace adulthood while searching for the truth about their missing parents. Set in 1994, it shows a new face of justice and democracy in the reunification of Cristina with her biological family and several positive steps towards the integration of the dictatorship era into contemporary Argentine political discourse. The director, Gastón Biraben trained extensively in the United States and *Cautiva* has a distinctly Hollywood polish to it, much like *La historia oficial* and *Imagining Argentina*. Although Biraben has no documentaries to his credit, he wrote the script for *Cautiva* based on interviews in Rita Arditti's book,

Searching for Life: The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Disappeared Children of Argentina, a testimonial. Testimonials share many political and aesthetic tendencies with documentaries and *Cautiva*'s tight shots of characters' faces contribute much to the documentary feel of the film.⁷⁰

Since *Cautiva* is the latest of the fictionalized films about this era and *La historia oficial* is the earliest, comparing several elements of the two films provides interesting commentary on the intervening years. While several themes show a progression between the two films, the persistent ambivalence towards the *Madres*, themselves, does not. Much like *La historia oficial*, *Cautiva* evades the controversies around the *Madres* by omitting the character of the *Madre* completely. It portrays the figure of the noble *Abuela*, Elisa, in the same way that *La historia oficial* portrays Sara. In contrast to the real-life combativeness of many of the *Madres*, the *Abuela* figure in *Cautiva* is refined and not overly emotional. She is careful to explain to her "recovered" granddaughter that she has been searching for her for sixteen years. She acknowledges that Cristina may have trouble adjusting to her new home and doesn't push too much change on her, despite the powerful resemblance to her disappeared daughter. Elisa is portrayed as benevolent and nurturing towards Cristina and is frequently backlit giving her a soft glow, almost halo-like glow.⁷¹ She is also remarkably composed, always well-dressed and coiffed, channeling her grief into classical music that she plays passionately when she is alone. She is never shown

⁷⁰Biraben wrote *Cautiva* as his masters' thesis at the American Film Institute and shopped it around Hollywood but without success. The fact that the film won two Silver Condor Awards in Argentina, the highest award given to cinema in the nation, suggests that he hit the mark in the most demanding audience for films on this topic.

⁷¹ Giannetti notes that backlighting is "especially evocative when used to highlight blond hair." (18) The grandmother figure has golden hair in *Cautiva*.

marching in public or weeping. Even her meetings with public authorities are done in the privacy of the judge's chambers. In short, she is everything that many of the real *Madres* are not –private in her grief, sophisticated, controlled, upper class. Her figure contrasts sharply with the real-life Hebe de Bonafini, president of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, whose extroversion, lower class background and disregard for decorum make her an easy target for charges of hysteria.⁷²

Cautiva's decision to center the narrative on a missing grandchild is at first a puzzling one. While the story of a missing grandchild is certainly a compelling one, it is not one of the more representative tales of the era.⁷³ There are a much greater number of *Madres* than *Abuelas*, and few of them have been reticent about their experiences. Part of this focus may be that crimes against children were the only ones for which the military could continue to be adjudicated even after the passage of *Punto Final* (Final Stop law) and the law of *Obedencia Debida* (Due Obedience). This has given the *Abuelas*' cases relatively more attention than they might have garnered otherwise, if this was measured more strictly by the numbers of cases. At the same time I suspect that avoiding a *Madre* character was rather more intentional in *Cautiva*. Like *La historia oficial*, it was probably meant to circumvent the ambivalence that might have turned Argentine viewers off to the film. Through the sympathetic grandmother, much like Sara in *La historia oficial*, the audience is drawn

⁷² The *Abuelas* have traditionally been more compromising than the *Madres*, at times even critiquing the *Madres*, as Estella Carlotto, president of the *Abuelas*, does with respect to Hebe de Bonafini. Of Bonafini's virulent refusal of reparations, Carlotto confesses that , "su actitud agresiva nos exaspera y esta no es la primera vez que la manifiesta" 'her aggressive attitude frustrates us and this is not the first time that she has shown it.' *Página 12*, Sept. 28, 2002.

⁷³ By 1997 *Las Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo* had documented the abduction of 88 children and the disappearance of 136 pregnant women. The group claims that the count is probably closer to 500 missing children given that many were not reported or their births were not recorded in captivity. (Arditti 50)

into the story of the respectable family of *desaparecidos* without getting defensive or judging them as responsible for their own tragedies.⁷⁴ Once viewers are invested in the film, they have to sort through multiple layers of ambivalence created by the dictatorship and the *Madres'* campaign: Cristina's adoptive parents are loving and kind but have lied to her for years; the sweet, attentive grandmother is her biological family but lives alone in a dark, melancholic home; Cristina's new friend is a recovered grandchild but is also a brooding social misfit.

Like *La historia oficial*, *Cautiva* also addresses the subjectivity of female characters and their acquisition of voice. The film, not released in Argentina until 2005, focuses on the subjectivity of the daughter of a disappeared couple.⁷⁵ This is in contrast to *La historia oficial*, which focuses on the subjectivation of the adoptive mother of a disappeared child. *Cautiva* follows Cristina as she evolves from an adored fifteen-year-old who is the center of her parents' life, to the daughter of *desaparecidos* whom she has never met. Her world is shaken as she discovers that her adoptive parents had hidden her biological origins from her for her entire life and she must now live with a stranger. As she moves in with her biological grandmother and sees her parents' jailed for her illegal adoption, she turns to a female schoolmate who is also the daughter of *desaparecidos*. While Cristina is silent for much of the first half of the film, she slowly begins to ask questions, much like Alicia in *La historia oficial* and Cecilia in *Imagining Argentina*. Through this she begins to construct

⁷⁴ A common theme among naive Argentines during the dictatorship era was that "tenía que haber un razón." ("there must have been a reason [for a family member being disappeared]" –implying that they were guilty of some transgression that warranted their abduction. This very phrase is used in *La historia oficial* when Alicia and her friends discuss the disappearance of a schoolmate's son during the repression.

⁷⁵ I first viewed this film first at a film festival in Washington, DC at least a year before its release in Argentina, an interesting pattern in distribution, confirming the dominance of U.S. film markets.

herself as a subject. Her friendship with Angélica in this process is her primary guide. As the girls search out Cristina's biological origins, Angélica tells Cristina her own family's political history and tragedy, thus demonstrating to Cristina the importance of knowing her own. While several reviews of *Cautiva* have critiqued the facility with which Cristina accepts the conditions of her new life, the actress, herself, does an excellent job of depicting her internal drama with fairly sparse dialogue. Where she is silent, her witnessing to Angélica's more verbal account of her own story is an important component in the development of her own voice.

Cristina's timid but growing relationship with her biological grandmother is also based on the telling of stories –which her grandmother does with courage yet restraint, modeling for Cristina the voice she will need to acquire to tell her own history in the future. A series of scenes flash to Cristina's serious discussions with the primary women in her life –her adoptive mother, her new grandmother, her new aunt, and her friend, Angélica. Although there is no sound, from their expressions we can see that she is synthesizing her new identity through these relationships. *Cautiva* continues the tradition of films that portray the dictatorship era and the legacy of the *Madres'* protests as rooted in female solidarity and subjectivity. Much like *La historia oficial* and *La amiga*, this film does not explicitly connect the development of female voice to the protests of the *Madres* but for Argentine viewers this legacy is never far from the surface.

Cautiva uses lighting in traditional ways, with light suggesting hope, and darkness surrounding the violence of the repression. Much like *La historia oficial* and *Imagining Argentina*, several scenes are shot primarily in darkness, evoking the

secrecy and fear of the repression. When Cristina hears the story of her birth from a nurse who was present for it, the narration takes place in a dark basement with one bare bulb hanging down --simulating the interrogation rooms of the *centros clandestinos* 'secret prisons.' The woman who has come to tell the birth story is fearful that she is being followed, and anxious that her identity be concealed. Even 25 years later, the legacy of the regime still haunts her. Similarly, when Cristina dreams of herself as an infant left alone on a speeding train, the scene is cloaked in darkness, capturing the secrecy in which her biological origins remain. In another dream sequence Cristina creeps down a darkened staircase to approach a shrouded woman who might (or might not) be her biological mother --another irretrievable mystery for her. Both of these scenes suggest Cristina's attempts to find answers that are forever lost to the crimes of the repression. In yet another scene darkness also cloaks people whose lives have been relegated to the past as a result of the dictatorship. Cristina's grandmother, Elisa, lives in a darkened house inhabited by a ghost, implicitly that of her murdered daughter. Despite her modern appearance, a part of Elisa is destined to live in the past --preserving her daughter's memory. In a haunting detail, Elisa preserves her daughter's room exactly as she left it some sixteen years ago.

Cautiva also uses the bird's eye view several times to convey Cristina's impotence in the face of much larger historical circumstances. As Cristina escapes from the judge's who wants to place her with her biological relatives, the camera follows her from above circling down the staircases of the elegant, marble building and darting in between well-dressed officials. Once on the street she is shot from

above as well, suggesting that even if she escapes she will be found by the legal system, in the same way that the Argentine nation cannot escape the truth of its past.

In another parallel to *La historia oficial*, shots of Cristina frequently involve rapid motion in the background. These convey the sense that the world is rushing by her, out of control. In several scenes the rapid motion behind Cristina (passing traffic, fellow students walking, trains whizzing by) emphasize her stillness and her difficulty in integrating sixteen years of national and familial history in a brief period. Tight shots of her face draws viewers to the inner workings of this sixteen-year-old who is forced to confront emotions of betrayal, loss and disorientation simultaneously.

One of the most valuable components of *Cautiva* is the hope that it expresses for the new generation. While *La historia oficial* ends ambiguously – audiences don't know what will happen to Gabby or to Alicia's family, *Cautiva* is much more promising. The wise, measured judge has placed Cristina back with her biological family with whom she appears to be integrating. Her progress is captured in the lighting with several important scenes shot outdoors in bright light to give them a documentary quality: Cristina playing soccer with her new cousins –too young to understand her story; Cristina bonding with her biological family at their “welcome home” cook out.⁷⁶ While the transition is difficult, Cristina is a bright, capable girl who makes use of all the resources at her disposal: a psychologist, her new family's openness, the support of another recovered child and her connections to other survivors of the era. The last shot of the film is symbolic in its mixture of light and darkness, with Cristina poised alone on the balcony of her new cousins' home,

⁷⁶ Giannetti explains that using outdoor lighting creates an image with a “hard edge quality” and an “absence of smooth modeling.” I would add that the documentary style increases the authority of the film in the eyes of audiences.

looking pensively up at the stars. As the camera pans back, it shows the night sky of Buenos Aires, lit up by thousands of tiny lights. Although she is still in darkness about her biological parents' identity there are many small lights of hope throughout the sky. The shot is an allegory for the Argentine nation's reconciliation with the violence of the last dictatorship and the truth is the only thing that brings any light to a very dark era.

Cautiva ends with an update on the number of children of *desaparecidos* who have been located and reunited with their biological families (74) and a dedication to “a los miles de ausentes cuyo voluntad de permanecía nos ha acompañado y cuyas historias han sido la fuente de creación de esta película.” ‘the thousands of the missing whose desire to remain has accompanied us and whose stories have been the creative fountain of this film.’ Cristina's story is clearly meant as a testimonial for those thousands of missing whose voices will never be heard.

Part III: CONCLUSION

These five films are not the only ones made about the *Madres* and the period of the repression. Others that explore some of the same themes include *Hermanas*, *Nietos*, *Hijos*, *La noche de los lapices*, *Sol de noche*, *Ritual de la Presencia*, and *Un muro de silencio*. I selected the five from this much larger group because they best captured some of the questions that have arisen around the *Madres*' during their protests. These questions go beyond the era of the repression and into Argentine notions of motherhood and their construction by patriarchy and Catholicism.

The *Madres* de la Plaza de Mayo fall into several liminal spaces in these films, reflecting some of the ambivalence that audiences experience towards them.

When compared to male characters, the women are shown to move more fluidly between the private and public spheres. Males are shown to want to preserve the patriarchal privilege in political and domestic spheres. Their behavior shows that the private sphere, while initially conceived as a refuge from the immorality and corruption of the outside world, can also be a place where moral transgressions such as illegal adoptions and domestic violence are more easily concealed. But not all males in the films abuse their power in the private sphere. The more idealistic ones continue to believe that the private sphere is a space that they can defend against public, and particularly state, intrusion. The women's facility in crossing the public/private divide suggests that they are much less vulnerable to the conception of the private sphere as one that can be protected from the public.

Family and patriarchy are also widely explored in the films. Attitudes towards violence, within and outside the home, are clear markers of patriarchy. It is consciously rejected by characters in later films, who envision a new democracy while earlier, patriarchal characters are shown resorting to violence as a way to solve their own personal frustrations. Attitudes towards family also reveal hidden patriarchal tropes. That family can be constructed in terms set by nationalist ideology is presented in most of the films as a regressive trend. The integrity of the biological family is given increasing importance in light of the illegal adoptions of the dictatorship era. The effects on the children of the *desaparecidos* are universally depicted as negative but the possibility of some imperfect reunification of biological families becomes increasingly possible in later films. While the actual number of these extra-legal adoptions "acquisitions" is comparatively low with respect to the

number of *desaparecidos*, their embodiment of the violence and deception of the dictatorship –and particularly its impact on the family—may explain its popularity in narrative and cinematic representation.

The dominance of reason over emotion is also shown to be central to the role of patriarchy in the political conflict captured in these films. Violence is explained as a rational choice within specific sociopolitical frameworks, and a tool that patriarchal figures, such as the dictatorship or the head of a household, can use at their discretion. Emotion is depicted as by patriarchy as dangerous when not channeled appropriately into nationalism or Catholic faith. On the other hand, these films posit the *Madres'* epistemological grounding in emotion as ethically superior to one based exclusively on reason. Emotion is shown to aid in the integration of the family, the bonding of its members, and the development of a moral compass. It also feeds the imagination, which allows both audiences and characters to visualize a world different from the horrors of the dictatorship.

Audience ambivalence about the real life *Madres'* campaigns continues to be an impediment to the development of films about the era. *Cautiva* and *La historia oficial* focus on an *Abuela* rather than a *Madre*, trying to minimize the mixed emotions that are provoked in the audiences around the *Madres*. *Imagining Argentina* and *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* ignore the ambivalence entirely, making the *Madres* into unproblematic heroines and the dictatorship into inhumane villains. *La amiga* is the only film that successfully explores this ambivalence in a way that helps audiences address their own conflicting impulses.

Much of the audience's ambivalence about the *Madres* can be explained by the group's outspokenness and tenaciousness. For over thirty years the women have agitated for investigations and trials for the guilty. In this sense, their narratives are powerful examples of the formation of subjectivity and voice in formerly marginalized citizens. The social and political forces that conspired to silence the *Madres*—the church, the state, sometimes their own families—were significant. That these women were able to see through their interpellation by patriarchy, nationalism and religion was an impressive feat itself. Going on to construct a coherent voice of resistance was extraordinary.

One of the triumphs of *La historia oficial* is the film's ability to represent this transformation in all its complexity. While it does not use a *Madre* as the main character, Alicia's evolution as a subject was clearly designed to parallel the *Madres'* experiences. While *Imagining Argentina* does little to develop the collective subjectivity of the *Madres*, Carlos' awkward substitution as a *Madre* does address the trope. The support he receives from his daughter and Leslie empower him to develop his creative voice in the service of the *Madres* group.

Cautiva is similar to *Imagining Argentina* in its omission of a *Madre* character but it does foreground Cristina's acquisition of subjectivity and voice through new relationships with women. *La amiga* is the only film that addresses this ambivalence directly, casting Raquel as the friend who tries to push María away from the *Madres'* activities. The relationship of the two friends is richly developed as their intimacy is challenged by María's subject position as a *Madre*. *The Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* captures the birth of the *Madres'* voices in the raw footage of their

early protests. Although the women don't reflect on the dynamics that helped them to construct their voices, their strength and solidarity is evident in several key shots.

All five of these films address controversial themes that have surrounded the movement of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*. Some of them relate to the *Madres* themselves and their personal development of subjectivity and voice. Other themes address the attitudes of Argentine society towards the group –ambivalence being the most frequently depicted. Still other tropes in the films explore the cultural attitudes of society towards the *Madres*, as women and as mothers. These patterns are shown as rooted in constructions of patriarchy, family, and Catholicism. The films show characters challenging paradigms that had been long established in Argentine culture and upsetting power relations that were comfortable for certain sectors of the population. These changes provoke anger and frustration in some characters, but liberation and discovery in others. The extent to which each film successfully problematizes such evolutions, or avoids them entirely, should be read through its historical time. The evolution of the discourse of the *Madres* and the political circumstances that have surrounded them in specific periods are powerful indicators of a film's tendency to challenge the status quo or to bury it in background characters. When considered as a body of work these films document not only the evolution of the *Madres'* group itself but also the integration of their continuing protests into Argentine political discourse.

Chapter 3: Essentialist Motherhood in the Vietnam War Protests

We who have given life must be devoted to preserving it. –Another Mother for Peace

I don't think the fact that milk once flowed in my breast is the reason I'm against the war.

--Betty Friedan, *Daring to Be Bad*

Just as the *Madres* movement was starting in Argentina another mothers' group in the United States was celebrating its role in helping to end the Vietnam War. Much like the Argentine group, Another Mother for Peace (AMP) was founded by fifteen women. Based in Hollywood, California in 1967, these women were disturbed by the thousands of U.S. casualties in Vietnam and the prospect of sending their own sons to fight in a distant war with uncertain goals. By 1967 the U.S. had been sending advisors to Vietnam for six years and Richard Nixon's administration was arguing that the domino effect –Communism sweeping Southeast Asia one country at a time—was a profound threat to U.S. security. In increasing numbers, U.S. advisors and troops were shipped into Vietnam in an undeclared war that was slowly documented by U.S. news media that for the first time fed live news footage of the conflict into American homes. In the end the U.S. would lose almost 60,000 U.S. soldiers in Vietnam.

Into this environment Another Mother for Peace began to grow, attracting a diverse contingent of women with their non-partisan slogan: "War is Not Healthy for Children and Other Living Things." Celebrity mothers such as Joanne Woodward, Felicia Montaleagre Bernstein, Betsy Palmer, and Barbara Avedon, reflected the

group's birth in the Hollywood/Beverly Hills area.⁷⁷ But the majority of AMP members were average mothers with sons who had been called to fight or who could eventually be drafted.. Among them were mothers who had already lost sons in the conflict and wanted to save other mothers the same grief. The group grew by word of mouth and wide-spread media coverage. Eventually the mothers produced their own regular newsletter that had 500,000 subscribers by 1978.

Much like the Argentine group, AMP's conflict was with its own government. The draft meant that young men were obliged to serve their country in Vietnam, regardless of their personal political leanings. One of AMP's first goals was to lobby Congress to end the draft. In the meantime they counseled young men about how to avoid the draft by claiming conscientious objector status or by going to jail instead of enlisting. While the group recognized that this solution was a band-aid on a much larger problem, it made a tangible difference in individual lives and allowed the women to contribute to the public discourse around the war. Much like the *Madres*, these mothers realized that much of their power resided in their identities as mothers, and their publications sought to emphasize that power. Their essentialist framings of motherhood are what separated them from other groups in which women worked against the Vietnam War in the same era, among them Women Strike for Peace and Students for a Democratic Society. The founders of AMP defined themselves as mothers first and thus, had a unique responsibility as well as a special authority: "We who have given life must be dedicated to preserving it" (AMP slogan). One of their

⁷⁷ Many of these women were initially identified as the wives of famous men (an interesting commentary on the era): J. Woodward was often called "Paul Newman's wife," despite her own fame as an actress; Barbara Avedon, herself a well-known writer, is often identified as the wife of Richard Avedon, famous photographer. Mrs. Leonard Bernstein never referred to by her own name in any of the AMP archives.

first mass mailings was organized around Mother's Day and sought to identify this day of homage with their mothers' desire to end the war. One thousand cards were printed and sent by mothers to members of Congress with this message: "This Mother's Day I don't want candy or flowers. I want an end to war." The first printing of the cards drew such attention that AMP printed another 10,000, then 100,000, and finally a total of 200,000, were printed (Woodward 1967). From their early newsletters and correspondences one can see the mounting energy as the women realize that their cause is taking on a life of its own. In one newsletter the mothers report that, "we can barely keep up with the requests for mailings" (AMP Newsletter 1969).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter will examine the discourse of Another Mother for Peace as produced by the group itself (in letters, mailings, newsletters and pamphlets) and by the popular media about the group (newspapers and magazines). Through these artifacts, I will examine how AMP members were able to successfully ground their authority as political subjects in essentialist notions of motherhood, while creating space for political action that was not confined to traditional images of women. I also will explore the specific discursive challenges that AMP faced in its construction of this new politicized motherhood and how their protests were integrated into popular discourse around motherhood and the War.

To better understand AMP's construction of authority, I will situate the group's discourse with respect to four primary influences: the female moral reform

movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; earlier maternal protests in the U.S.; the second wave of feminism; and the growth of Women Strike for Peace in the 1960s.

In my textual analysis of material from the AMP archives at Swarthmore College I will connect four cultural paradigms around womanhood/motherhood to the content or form of AMP's discourse: the Victorian notion of private/public and the ideology of "separate spheres"; the position of women in the nature/culture dyad; the association of women with emotion and men with reason; and Freudian psychoanalytic theory and the feminist responses. The first three closely parallel the *Madres'* experiences and will help to show the extent to which both movements both benefited from and were hindered by patriarchy.

ESSENTIALISM

The rise of AMP in the late 1960s and early 1970s coincided with growing popularity in the U.S. of the white middle class phenomenon of cultural feminism. Cultural feminists of the mid 1970s formulated the idea of patriarchy as the nexus of power relations, expressed in family dynamics, politics, sexuality and more. Many of them believed that the most effective means to counteract patriarchal power was to create a women's culture that would embrace anti-patriarchal values. Oriented towards the production and valuation of a "women's" culture, this movement focused on the "mother" as a universal category, rather than on "woman," which had encountered serious problems in incorporating differences in race, class and sexuality. The category of "mother," while unable to completely transcend these differences,

refocused attention on shared characteristics with a biological basis. Qualities such as nurturing, patience, and gentleness were celebrated by cultural feminists as innately female, and mothers were afforded special status: “the capacity to bear and nurture children gives women special consciousness, a spiritual advantage, rather than disadvantage” (Barbara Deming’s qtd. in Echols 253).

Another trend in the 1970s was the popular concept of matriarchal societies and deities based on a Great Mother figure. The writings of Mary Daly *Beyond God the Father* and Adrienne Rich *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* contrasted patriarchal values with those that could flourish in cultures guided by women and particularly mothers⁷⁸ (Umansky). The life-giving capacities of mothers and the practice of mothering seemed to exemplify some of the central values of cultural feminism –care, nurturing, and community.

This approach was not without its opponents, however. Critics argued that cultural feminism relied too much on essentialist notions of women. Much like *marianismo*, it constructed mothers in terms that had the potential to return them exclusively to the private, domestic sphere and keep them out of public politics. Very similar to Argentine notions of mothers’ spiritual natures, U.S. cultural feminists saw this construction as empowering mothers/women in “natural” qualities and private experiences already in their domain. But other feminists argued that mothers/women had to develop skills that might not be “natural” to them such as aggression, independence, rational thought, and enact them in the public sphere. As the New York Radical Women explained, “until women go beyond justifying themselves in

⁷⁸ For more on this see Alice Echols’ *Daring to be Bad*.

terms of their wombs and breasts and housekeeping abilities they will never be able to exert any political power.” (qtd. in Echols 55-56).

Although the earliest origins of essentialism may have been lost on these maternal activists, seventeenth century philosopher and proponent of the scientific revolution, Francis Bacon, identified science with males and nature with females (Holloway 45-47). Science was rational and controlled while nature was uncontrollable. In other eras this same distinction had been represented as the association of men with culture and women with nature (Jordanova 1993). As feminist theorist Ludmilla Jordanova notes, although the dichotomy of male/science and female/nature was clearly an incomplete picture of women’s activities even in the seventeenth century, such images and symbols persisted. She views this as evidence that these constructions were motivated by ideology rather than accurate representation (374). From a patriarchal perspective, there were several advantages to keeping women in the private sphere, and “naturalizing” them facilitated this.

Ludmilla also makes the point that Enlightenment attempts to understand women as human beings were ambiguous at best, as they were related to contradictory Enlightenment notions of Nature. On the one hand, Nature was demystified and became a force that could be understood by reason, reflecting the Enlightenment movement away from superstition and dogma. At the same time those parts of Nature that remained inaccessible for lack of scientific instrumentation were widely described as “the wilderness and deserts, unmediated and dangerous territory” (Ludmilla 376). Similarly, women were at once newly accessible through medicine and science, which could better understand their bodies and, thus, theoretically their

motives and behaviors. However, they were still inaccessible as beings because so much of their lives were determined by emotion and passion, ostensibly foreign to male essence, which was theorized as reason-based. Since the emotional episteme was considered uniquely female, women's make up was also aligned with the wildness of Nature ---uncontrollable, unknowable, untamable. If we apply this metaphor to the construction of motherhood in the twentieth century a similar pattern emerges. Although science has progressed so that even women's psyches are supposedly accessible to science, and neurobiology is often used to explain their behaviors, there persists the metaphor of the woman who is out of control for reasons that relate directly to her femaleness. Sigmund Freud popularized the term "hysteria," to describe neurotic symptoms in women. It was no accident that he used the ancient Greek word for uterus (*hystera*) to support his theory that the symptoms of neurosis (anxiety, emotional instability) in women were caused by an irregularity of the uterus. While much of Freudian theory has been debunked on scientific grounds in the late twentieth century and sharply criticized by feminists, its precepts were stronger in the 1970s when Another Mother for Peace was organizing.⁷⁹ In combination with Simone de Beauvoir's influential *The Second Sex* (1953) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), questions about gender and essentialism abounded in the early 1970s when AMP organized. Paradoxically, the debunking of large portions of Freud's psychoanalytic work has returned us to a conception of women as a kind of mysterious force, whose essence cannot really be explained by science. Some of this trend comes from the proliferation of feminist writers who have decried placing

⁷⁹ His notion of the "wandering uterus" causing neurotic symptoms, for example, is now considered a bit laughable.

women in reductive categories based on biology, since this was done for centuries to women's great disadvantage. This has resulted in a movement, which I describe in detail below, towards a type of essentialism that once again evokes a mystery and inaccessibility surrounding women. But if we read this trend closely, it is clear that this new essentialism is based on experience rather than biology, as discussed in my first chapter. The distinction is often misread in popular culture, particularly with respect to motherhood, as a biological essentialism, in part because shared biological characteristics are more apparent than behavioral ones.

Twentieth-century motherhood, although seemingly removed from the Victorian era, is still a palimpsest of earlier constructions. As women have come to successfully perform almost all of the duties that were traditionally relegated to males, thus disproving many of the Victorian concepts of women as physically feeble, incapable of reason, and "naturally" more suited to the domestic sphere, the notion of separate spheres has been gradually eroded in the second half of the twentieth century in the U.S.⁸⁰ While it is socially acceptable in the United States for women to perform almost all the duties that men do, literal mothering is one realm to which men can have no direct access. It remains a space that is mysterious for its foreignness and thus, becomes fertile ground for theories based in conceptions of nature and biology.

While the Enlightenment valued the acquisition of knowledge by reason, based on the senses, middle class Victorian women were judged as poor subjects

⁸⁰ The exception is that the notion of separate spheres persists in some Christian fundamentalist communities in the US. Further research on the religious identities of AMP participants would provide interesting data on the extent to which religious constructions of motherhood affected the likelihood of mothers to participate in Vietnam protests. While many of the *Madres* in Argentina abandoned their Catholic roots to venture into public protest, AMP had the unique quality of offering "public" protest from the home. Women did not have to appear in public, but could organize their neighbors in "private" and participate in letter-writing from home. The *Madres* in Argentina did not have this option.

since their daily responsibilities demanded more reliance on emotion: the care of small children, management of relations with servants, soothing of male egos. Since their lives frequently required that they rely on emotion more than reason to guide them, they became associated with emotion. The ultimate expression of women's association with nature was childbirth –a force which men could neither experience nor control. The emotional bond with a child one had carried in one's own body was an experience that men could not have.

Given the reason/emotion dyad, and the history of women's segregation to one pole, one might expect that activist mothers would distance themselves from emotion. But the mothers of AMP, like the *Madres*, relied heavily on emotion in their public calls to end the War. They also demonstrated that emotion was a legitimate epistemological grounding for their group. They were founded explicitly as a "group of worried mothers" (Woodward 1967). At the same time they were careful to avoid playing on emotions that might be considered unappealing in women –especially anger. One member confesses that, "In recent times I have not wept gently. I have wept with rage, with frustration and with horror" (Gittelson). Although this mother admits to her anger, it is tempered by her feminine side, which weeps –evoking the image of the *mater dolorosa*. Her grief makes her anger palatable as she explains that, "no woman can confront her own motherhood on the happy, close and carefree family holiday of May 11th [Mother's Day] without grieving for tragic, careworn parents all over the world whose children have been lost" (Gittelson 1969). In public protests the mothers evoke the desperation and impotence that they felt in fighting for their cause: "Please No, Mr. Nixon, Not Our Sons" and

“Mom and Dad, Your Silence is Killing Me” (Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace* 97).

The movement of middle class women into the public workplace in the twentieth century has proven that women shape culture and employ reason in ways that are similar to men. Does this mean that women have shaken the association with nature? Not entirely. Anthropologist Sherry Ortner explains cogently that women have, instead, come to occupy a space in the conversion of nature to culture, especially as relates to the socialization of children. Since children continue to be cared for primarily by females and mothers, North American culture has had to realize that women are powerful agents of culture, despite their “natural” classification. Ortner calls this position women’s “mediating function,” i.e. women take on the task of moving children from nature to culture: “Any culture’s continued viability depends upon properly socialized individuals who will see the world in that culture’s terms and adhere more or less unquestionably to its moral precepts” (Ortner 84). We can see clear examples of this phenomenon in the twentieth century in the tendency of conservative states to target mothers as guardians of national identity. Propaganda campaigns targeted towards mothers frequently include injunctions about how to properly raise children as loyal citizens. Ortner’s theory of the intermediate function of women also explains why women’s public activities (and particularly sexuality) are more tightly regulated than men’s. The production of socialized individuals who will obey cultural precepts depends largely on the “stability of the domestic unit,” which will produce such outcomes. Restrictions on women’s movements in the public sphere, which can be observed in almost all patriarchal

cultures, are thought to enhance this stability (85). Ortner's observation that women generally are socialized to embrace more conservative attitudes and values than men supports this argument. The restriction of women's activities in certain social and political contexts, in turn, enhances this tendency.

Ortner's thesis explains several of the dynamics that surrounded the activities of Another Mother for Peace. First, there is tendency by conservative patriarchal structures to view women's political movements, especially those of mothers, with suspicion and hostility that seem out of proportion to the women's political power. They seem particularly disturbed by the disruption of the public/private divide, which is intimately connected to the stability of the nuclear family. Second, attention to the appearance and sexuality of female activists can be explained by its roots in this paradigm, in which control over women's sexuality is seen as an essential sign of control over the stability of the family, and thus, the production of obedient citizens, and the stability of the state. Finally, motherhood occupies a particularly powerful political space because mothers can much less easily be stigmatized as unruly sexual subjects given that they are generally married and less likely to challenge social norms if they are raising a child.⁸¹

One final component of Ortner's discussion is relevant to my analysis of AMP. Ortner argues that the location of women and, I would add mothers, in this intermediate space between nature and culture puts females in a position of "greater symbolic ambiguity." The tendency of diverse cultures to cast women in polarizing roles is easily observed. Women are frequently cast as goddesses, exhalted,

⁸¹ There are examples, of course, of single or divorced mothers whose marital status is highlighted as a sign of her "instability." Media attention to Cindy Sheehan's divorce during her Iraq protest is a good example.

dispensers of salvation, and transcendent or evil, witches, castrating mothers, and whores. Ortner explains this tendency through women's inability to occupy either space fully from the perspective of patriarchy, which has historically defined such terms. Her "natural" sphere –giving birth, breast feeding, caring for young children, is so foreign to the male experience that it is mythologized as the Great Mother, self-sacrificing, transcendent. A mother's contributions to the cultural sphere are judged only in terms of her ability to produce loyal, obedient subjects for the state and patriarchal powers. If she deviates from behaviors that are thought to accomplish this – acting out sexually, spending too much time in the public sphere, thinking too independently then she is vilified as a whore, home wrecker, or a witch. The prospect of this frequently has the social effect of discouraging such behavior in the first place. While Ortner focuses primarily on women, mothers are clearly more vulnerable to being cast into these polarized categories because of their childbearing experiences. At the same time mothers, in their daily care of children, play a powerful and central role in the construction of culture through the production of citizens for the state. This background provides an interesting theory for why political motherhood is such a powerful space, why it is viewed with such suspicion by patriarchal powers, including nationalist women, and why women/maternal activists often are attacked with respect to their sexuality.

. Another force that affected the discourse of AMP was the role of psychoanalysis in the twentieth century. Freudian psychoanalysis fed into the nature/culture dyad by reifying the association of the mother figure with nature as an uncontrollable force that threatens the very stability of the male subject.

Psychoanalytic theory posits the male child's differentiation from the mother in the Oedipal phase, in which he projects the unwanted parts of himself on to her. The mother then comes to embody all that is unwanted –particularly emotions that the male child cannot process. Thus, she becomes a threat to him and he seeks to dominate her, while also obeying cultural injunctions to respect her as a force of nature (Holloway 47-49). The popularity of Freudian theory led to a movement in the 1940s and 1950s dubbed “anti-momism.” This trend considered that mothers who were overly doting towards their sons would emasculate them, making them into “sissies” (Swerdlow *Women Strike* 172).) This anxiety would later be cited as a reason that Women Strike for Peace was hesitant to allow mothers to take a public role in draft resistance.

What influence does this long history have on the discourse produced by and around Another Mother for Peace? Three dynamics that appear to grow out of this history have had a significant impact on the way that the group represented itself or was represented by others: the use of emotion as episteme; a reliance on experiential essentialism; and the intentional joining of the private and public spheres. These are important because they influenced the ability of the group to affect discourse, to provoke social change, and to use motherhood successfully as a political identity. Given the limitations that the second wave of feminism has noted upon universal sisterhood as a political force, this shift towards motherhood is an important one. It may also be a discursive space in which women who have been traditionally most limited to action in the private sphere --because of the “private” responsibilities of children-- may act in public.

ESSENTIALISM IN AMP NARRATIVES

Beginning with its earliest mailing in April of 1967 AMP conjured up images of mothers that were essentialist, asserting that “A Mother’s dream of peace is older than time” (Woodward 1967). This first letter describes the humble origins of the group speaking of a mother’s “deep yearning” for peace, conjuring up archetypal images of motherhood. AMP’s archives are filled with mothers’ writings around their spiritual and physical bonds with their children, most with some naturalist imagery of the mother as biologically connected to her child: “As my first tiny babe was given into my arms...In greatest fascination I beheld his infant charms.... I know of a mother’s pride and joy... the moment I held my newborn baby boy....” (Mrs. Billie Backer, writing of the birth of her first born, Jimmy, killed in Vietnam at age 19). A 1969 editorial in *Harper’s Bazaar* has one mother explain that, “I believe that the reverence for life must live especially in female loins. ... Each child who dies...in the final obscenity of war is lost by every woman who has ever borne a child –and by all those women who have not, but whose maternity is no less vibrant” (Gittleson). It is not only childbirth but the energy and devotion of childcare that makes mothers particularly connected to children: “We labor to bring children into the world...we sacrifice to raise them. And every mother all over the world rears her young with the same love and concern. And then these children are ripped from us and sent out to kill each other” (AMP newsletter 1970). The mother is specially connected to her child physically and spiritually. For those mothers who have lost sons in Vietnam, AMP reminds its audiences that this Mother’s Day is a painful reminder of their losses:

“Will your son be home for the special day? 40,282 sons that we know about will not....” For these mothers, no gift can fill the space, for “what she really wants for Mother’s Day is lying dead in a grave, buried with her dreams for his life” (AMP newsletter 1970). Mothers lose not only the enjoyment of watching their children grow but the promise that they will enjoy rich lives beyond their own. As natural as a mother’s role in a child’s birth, her presence for his death is particularly poignant. The popular press fed into this imagery with relish. Countless articles on the group lead with imagery that conjured these mothers protecting their sons out of some biological drive: “A lioness protecting her cubs is merely a cuddly, purring pussycat by comparison [to the AMP mothers]” (Bigelman 1967).

Because of their bonds to their children, AMP asserted that mothers also share a bond to each other: “No mother is the enemy of another mother” (Angie Brooks AMP newsletter 1970). This is the same experiential essentialism that the *Madres* relied upon in reaching out to mothers’ groups outside of Argentina. The experience of motherhood, despite differences in race, nationality, and class gives mothers a shared essence. Sara Ruddick’s *Maternal Thinking* describes this same phenomenon in slightly different terms: all mothers come to share certain disciplinary skills which mothering demands of them. Among these skills are patience, flexibility, reading emotions, and nurturing. Ruddick argues that there is nothing “natural” about these qualities but rather, that they are the product of the demands of mothering young children. While her explanation seems to take away some of the magical qualities of motherhood it explains why AMP mothers, as well as other politicized mothers, proved themselves to be much richer than the narrow portrait that traditional

motherhood paints of them. In their activism they were not always patient –they could be demanding and impatient in their campaign. They were not merely weeping – they were at times very angry and quite willing to show it. They were not always polite – they could be rude and confrontational. They were not only emotional beings –they were quite rational and intentional in their campaigns.

While AMP clearly recognized that its power resided in constructing an essential maternal identity, it also sensed that such essentialism could be dangerous in several ways. First, it could be crippled by patriarchal nationalist groups that defined motherhood in very traditionalist ways, making public protest by women improper and shaming them back into the domestic sphere. Or it could be targeted by feminist groups who claimed that one could not be liberated and act primarily from a maternal space –which had been traditionally dominated by patriarchal constructions of motherhood. Betty Friedan captures this sentiment in her critique of maternalist rhetoric with, “I don’t think that the fact that milk once flowed within my breast is the reason I’m against the war” (qtd. in Echols 1989). From the opposite extreme, essentialism in conservative hands also made AMP vulnerable to being cast as a radical feminist group – all separatist lesbians, for example, who sought to revolutionize gender identity.

To overcome these obstacles AMP took steps to define its motherhood in expansive ways. Their political motherhood could be domestic or professional, public or private, sexually “liberated” or conservative. Above all mothers who participated were most certainly patriots, citizens and democrats. AMP took pains to redefine these terms in popular discourse so that their mothers could not be attacked

on any of these grounds. In the end AMP was successful at using essentialism because it formulated it on an experiential basis, and not a proscriptive one. It was open about the limited basis upon which mothers can claim common ground. Much like the Argentine *Madres*, it did not claim too much but enough to form a shared voice.

In the struggle to define motherhood for the purposes of political action AMP had to address several elements of maternal identity that were contested in the 1960s and 1970s. The growth of the second wave of feminism, and the backlash against it had problematized several paradigms central to female identity: sexuality, emotion as episteme and the private/public binary.⁸² Beginning with the civil rights movement, which examined how race was constructed in North American society, the 1960s feminist movement began to examine gender identities as socially and culturally constructed, an analysis that had also occurred in the first wave but in even more limited circles. Were women “naturally” passive, emotional, and submissive? Or had they just been taught to perform femaleness this way? Was sexual desire a male force or had it been constructed this way in order to control women and keep them loyal to their sexual partners? Were women more “naturally” suited to childcare and domestic work or had they been constructed this way so that men could maintain economic power as breadwinners? Were women more “naturally” emotional or had they been unfairly stereotyped this way by patriarchal systems that privileged reason in epistemological practices? The brilliance of AMP was that it did not try to answer any of these questions for its members or potential members. Nor did it try avoiding

⁸² For more on these, see *Daring to be Bad* by Alice Echols, *Personal Politics* by Sara Evans, and *Sights on the Sixties* by Barbara Tischler.

these topics that were so heatedly debated in so many circles in their era. Its success was in its simplicity: mothers/women on all sides of these debates could join AMP.

In order to properly read the meanings embedded in AMP's discourse we must look closely at four historical trends that shaped the movement: the history of female moral reform; the history of maternal protest in the U.S., including nationalist mothers; the first and second waves of feminism; and the 1961 appearance of Women Strike for Peace on the political scene.

WOMEN AND MORAL REFORM MOVEMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

One of the most marked trends in female organizing has been the inclination to “moral reform” in the last two centuries. Women have been at the forefront of numerous movements for social change in the U.S.: the reform of sexual morality (1830-1840s), the abolitionist movement (first half of the nineteenth century), the temperance movement (1870s – 1930s), and the suffrage movement (late 1800s to 1920). The American Female Moral Reform Society of the 1830s-1840s sought to protect women from seduction, prostitution and licentious men. They focused on the proper education of children by their mothers, arguing that: “A mother's love will accomplish more than anything else except omnipotence” (qtd. in Moses and Hartmann 17). In the later half of the 1800s the Women's Christian Temperance Union was especially active in the temperance movement (Parker). Women in the U.S. have long been considered to hold court over moral and religious issues because these were considered so close to matters of the “home.” While men operated in the “public” world of business and politics, women were considered experts in matters of

the “private” world –raising children, keeping home, cultivating religious values. If women were to cross this divide, it could only be on issues that were solidly linked to morality. So U.S. women’s involvement in public crusades against licentiousness, slavery and drinking were considered appropriate extensions of their moral natures. Paradoxically, women’s agitation for voting rights was also explained in terms of their responsibilities in the private sphere. While casting a ballot was still not “natural” for women it was justified in terms of their desire to gain sway over issues that affected home life and family. As one of the leaders of the Women’s Christian Temperance Movement put it, suffrage was “necessary to protect a woman’s traditional role as wife and mother” (Frances Willard qtd. in Hymowitz and Weissman 189). Although women’s associations with pacifist movements in the twentieth century were considered to be liberal, this has not always been the case with other moral causes.

Reactions to women/mothers’ entrance into the public sphere, albeit on moral issues, have not been entirely favorable. Early female abolitionists were mocked as bitter spinsters or loose women. Some clergy wrote that women who acted in such public politics would lose the ability to have children –as their wombs would dry up from disuse. The early suffragettes were often jeered and taunted on speaking tours, labeled as “unnatural” women for their outspokenness and independence (Hymowitz and Weissmann 82-84).

WOMEN'S PROTEST IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Compared to their earlier activist sisters AMP evoked relatively little public criticism in the 1960s and 1970s. But this may be because earlier mothers/women's groups had absorbed the brunt of it. Although few women's groups defined themselves as mothers' groups, many women's activists groups in the nineteenth century relied on a distinctly maternalist rhetoric. Their arguments were that because of women's natures as nurtures and their role as caretakers, they had an "obligation to ameliorate society through their mothering abilities" (Strange, 211). This belief followed women into the twentieth century when women gathered during WWI (1915) and called themselves the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. This group rested on the ideology of social motherhood: "women who have brought men into the world and nurtured them until they reach the age for fighting must experience a particular revulsion when they see them destroyed" (Addams qtd. in Strange, 213). The Women's Peace Party, also formed in 1915, similarly called upon "the ideology of nurturant motherhood" to explain its pacifism (Steinson 259). Resting on the Enlightenment notion of women's natures, this view affirmed that because of their maternal roles, women were different from men "temperamentally, psychologically, and intellectually.... women instinctively gave their unselfish devotion to the nature and protection of life" (Steinson 259). Several other women's peace groups formed in the 1920s, including the Women's Peace Union, the Women's Peace Society and the National Committee on the Cause and Cure of War (Swerdlow *Women Strike for Peace* 33). Many of these groups extended their motherhood alliances across borders, arguing that women/mothers of different nations

could understand each other's sufferings and losses like no other. Anna Howard Shaw, speaking to the Women's Peace Party in 1915 argued that, "When mothers look at the face of a dead soldier we see two dead, the man and the life of the woman who gave him birth; the life she wrought into his life" (qtd. in Steinson 263).

But not all U.S. mothers shared this vision. Another group of women, "patriotic maternalists," organized themselves into the largest of several patriotic preparedness leagues, the Women's Section of the Navy League (WSNL) (Strange 21). WSNL's rhetoric tied women's support for the war to their "instinct of motherhood" which would show them that "women's protective functions made it their duty to demand strong military defenses" (Steinson 266). The group linked this instinct to women's traditional domestic and child rearing roles. As one member, Vylla Poe Wilson explained, "It is only just that her voice, raised in a cry for preparedness to protect the lives and homes she has been a chief factor in building up, should be harkened unto" (qtd. in Steinson 266). The existence of these two opposing groups exemplifies one of the risks of using essentialism in maternal organizing: it can be used for nationalist, pro-military purposes as easily as pacifist ones. While pacifists may argue that mothers are more "naturally" inclined to oppose violence, this same "nature" can also be used to draw mothers into paradigms of patriotic, sacred duty. The formation of the Gold Star Mothers in WWI is another example of such discursive molding. During WWI it became customary for mothers who had lost sons to be presented with a gold star representing their sacrifice. In 1928 a group of these mothers joined together and officially formed the American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. Their mission was to comfort other mothers, maintain the

memories of their lost sons, and provide support for injured soldiers far from home. This tradition was carried into WWII, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. The group is now associated with patriotism and a support-the-troops mentality, listing several nationalist objectives in its mission statement, including to “inspire respect for the Stars and Stripes in the youth of America; inculcate lessons of patriotism and love of country in the communities in which we live; maintain true allegiance to the United States of America.” (Gold Star Moms 2006).⁸³

SECOND WAVE FEMINISM

By the late 1960s, debate about the place of women/mothers in the U.S. post-industrial society had been simmering for decades. Although it was hinted at during the first wave of feminism when women argued that they were intelligent and reasonable enough to vote in U.S. elections, economic conditions did not make middle class women working in public a widespread reality until the industrial revolution.⁸⁴ Debates about this pattern began in earnest during and after the Second World War when many middle class women went to work in factories to bolster wartime production, and to fill in for the men who had joined the military. For some middle class women this was the first time that they had earned wages on their own.

⁸³ The fact that Cindy Sheehan, the mother who lost her son in Iraq and launched a public crusade against the US war in Iraq, has chosen a similar name for her anti-war group, Gold Star Families for Peace, is an interesting twist on the traditional ideology of the Gold Star Mothers. The American Gold Star Mothers' group explains on their website that they are not affiliated with Sheehan.

⁸⁴ Women of the lower class had always worked in public from the days of slavery onward. Women had also worked hard labor jobs on family farms for centuries but this was considered private work and thus there was little public debate about it. The issue of women's participation in public work was not publicly debated until after the industrial revolution when larger numbers of people acquired enough economic security that they could afford to have only one income earner. In this era it became a marker of status for the woman of a family to stay at home and supervise her servants or do her own domestic work, rather than interact in public spaces.

For some working class women this was the first time that they entered into skilled labor jobs. When the war was over and many of the men returned home, a portion of these women did not want to leave their jobs, as they had become content with their new skills, wages, and community with other women. The U.S. government had to produce a propaganda campaign urging women to turn these jobs back over to the veterans who needed them.⁸⁵ Much of the campaign focused on convincing middle class women that their children needed them at home and were on the road to moral corruption without proper maternal supervision.⁸⁶ For many working women who did not have the luxury of returning home, the post-war period was one of frustration as they began to realize that they were being paid far less than men for the same work.

Most middle class women did return home, and with the post-war housing boom, new attention to home appliances, décor, and consumerism occupied many young mothers' energies. It was not until the beginning of the second wave of feminism –an outgrowth of the civil rights movement -- that some middle class women again began to question their roles as domestic workers. Betty Friedan's influential *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) articulated many of the questions that middle class women of this era were asking themselves about their feelings of isolation. As whites were pushed out of the civil rights Movement by the black power movement and activist white men turned their organizing skills to the Vietnam War, white women began to realize that they were being unjustly dominated by white men. Taking a lesson from the Black Power Movement's insightful turn inwards towards the black community, activist white women began to see that they should be

⁸⁵ Ironically the US government had produced a similar film in order to convince women to take on "male" jobs at the beginning of the war.

⁸⁶ For more on these dynamics see the documentary, "Rosie the Riveter."

advocating for their own rights as equals to white men. Numerous conditions highlighted this new attention towards gender. Betty Friedan's book sold 300,000 copies in the first year, calling into question the construction of women as primarily childbearing beings, not adequate to take on professional roles equal to men. The advent of the birth control pill had freed middle class women from a life time of child raising and left them wondering why they couldn't excel professionally or why they continued to be defined primarily by their roles as wives and mothers.

The passage of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights act that prevented discrimination on the basis of sex gave women a new legal weapon with which to address these issues. The law provided powerful new avenues for women to fight their ghettoization in low paying jobs, unequal pay for the same work, and sexual harassment (Hymowitz and Weissman 1978). The founding of the National Organization for Women (1966) and the Women's Equity Action League (WEAL) along with several other women's organizations in the late 1960s lead to an explosion in attention to issues of gender. Underneath the issues of gender roles, birth control, sexuality, and legal rights lurked the question of essentialism. Were women biologically or "naturally" different from men or were they socialized to perform gender differently? This would be a question that different women's groups would answer in diverse ways and one that Another Mother for Peace would have to carefully negotiate in its recruitment efforts. Despite their divergent agendas the discourse that women's groups like NOW and WEAL popularized had an overall positive impact on the birth and growth of Another Mother for Peace. They questioned paradigms that might have kept more women from leaving the domestic

sphere to protest publicly or from honoring their own emotional aversion to the War. As Sally Kempton put it in 1970, the second wave helped women to question whether it was true that they were “stupid, unable to analyze anything, ‘intuitive’, ‘passive,’ physically weak, hysterical, overemotional, dependent by nature,...fit only to be the housekeeper, sex object and emotional service center for some man or men and children” (qtd. in Hymowitz 350).

The second wave also questioned several traditional paradigms around sexuality. First, the restrictions that were put on women’s sexuality were deconstructed, lifting many of the taboos that regulated middle class sexuality and arguing that desire was not limited to men. Women could initiate relationships and enjoy sex. On the other hand women were also becoming conscious of the tendency to objectify the female body so sexual desire was simultaneously viewed with a new suspicion. For Christian mores all such questioning conflicted with traditional mores that stigmatized women who were sexually active before marriage. AMP realized that there would be women in their midst with different attitudes towards sexuality and they worked to include them all.

Popular press on AMP pays particular attention to members’ attractiveness, indicating that appearance and politics were dynamics that readers were still sorting out. This is evident in numerous newspapers and feature articles, not coincidentally, written by men. But the pattern is so widespread that it goes beyond the mere attraction of these individual writers for their subjects. The articles seem to try to reconcile what were contradictory images for some: sexual, attractive women who were also intelligent political activists. Some of them express surprise at this

combination. A newspaper article from AMP's archives on the group's origins is topped by a large photograph of two women, a writer and a TV actress, both very attractive by conventional white, middle-class standards. The headline reads "A Gentle Reminder by Two Doves," suggesting the pacifist politics of the women and the natural temperament of their gender. The copy describes their campaign as "the gentlest protest of all" and notes that "blond, pretty Whitney Blake", was drawn to the movement "by the cute little cards" that AMP produced. She may be working for AMP now but she is not one of those radical leftist women. In fact, the article focuses on how Whitney "wanted to see the fighting stopped, but I didn't really want to get involved" (Craib 1967). The profiling of a woman who got involved with AMP despite her clearly feminine appearance and propensities --she wanted to stay in the private sphere-- is one example of how the press tried to make sense of this paradoxical movement. AMP itself touted this pattern as well, claiming that, "We've had letters from all over the country from women who want peace but who would never demonstrate or walk a picket line" (Barbara Avedon qtd. in Lilliston 1967). The high profile actress, Joanne Woodward, wife of Paul Newman, even described herself as more "maternally oriented than politically" (Radcliffe 1969). Throughout its Vietnam activities AMP tread carefully around the issue of their political nature, catering to several types of women. Perhaps foremost was caution that "We don't want to scare the Silent Majority mothers who never did anything [political] before" (AMP Archives). At the same time they were training women to take political action: write letters, send telegrams, march on Washington. But they weren't calling it politics because they had to sell it as the purview of the private sphere, in which

women could act appropriately. But feminist commentators during and after the Vietnam campaign refer to the development of AMP, along with other women's groups, as engaging in a new kind of politics.

The prominence of several television and film stars in AMP brought even more attention to the issue of appearance and sexuality. Although AMP seems willing to make use of the sex appeal of many of its famous members, it is also careful to show its awareness of objectification as a current feminist issue. When Bess Myerson, a popular, television celebrity in the 1960s, and a former Miss America, appeared on the ABC network representing AMP, the group acknowledged her sex appeal while keeping the focus on her message. It urged AMP members to send a postcard to the TV station thanking it for the airtime, explaining that this was "really the best way to thank Bess for making the beautiful inside of her head visible to millions of viewers" ("Good Better Bess" AMP Archives 1968). When Donna Reed led AMP's campaign to expose the presence of U.S. oil drilling companies in SE Asia she was profiled as the Oscar-winning actress "who used to be America's favorite television housewife [and] is playing a new role these days.... She has put away the greasepaint to look for oil" (McGrory 1971). Her transition from sex symbol to activist is one that apparently requires comment even from female writers like Mary McGrory.

Another writer for the *Herald Tribune*, opens his 1967 portrait of the group's activities by describing their members in terms of age, religion and physical attractiveness: "They are young women, middle-aged women, elderly women-- They are the Jewish mother, the Protestant mother, the Catholic mother.... They are short,

tall, slender. Many are attractive externally, all are inwardly so” (Bigelman). Clearly the sexuality of AMP’s members is a characteristic of interest to readers who might have been struggling with the questions raised by the second wave of feminism. Can these activist women still be sexual? Are they all unattractive? –as if that would clearly explain their disgruntledness. And for female readers the question may be: will I be shunned by men if I join this group?

The sexual attractiveness of AMP’s members seems to have been linked to their femininity as well. Numerous articles, by AMP members and by outside writers, focus on how these women are still adequately feminine in attitudes and aesthetics. They are still “real” women and don’t seem to have been masculinized by their political activities. One AMP mother who writes passionately about her membership also tells her audience that she is still a sucker for traditional Mother’s Day: “I love festivals. I love parties. I love presents ... that come snowed under mountains of white tissue in those pretty Bergdorf and Bendel boxes.....I dig... the pink, fresh carnation on the tray...all that sweet pomp and circumstance can still bring tears to my eyes” (Gittleson 1969). The rest of her insightful article goes on to deride the reduction of Mother’s Day to a flurry of consumerism while thousands of mothers are losing their sons in Vietnam. But she can only make this argument once she has established her proper femininity. And even then she is apologetic at raining on the ultimate celebration of the feminine, and careful not to project too much anger or aggression: “As a woman and a mother, I have begun to feel slightly sold out, slightly disappointed, slightly ill-at-ease by the innocent mindlessness of May 11th” (Gittleson 1969). In addition to her hesitant condemnation she must also establish

that she is not anti-male, which she does by narrating her devotion to her son and husband.

AMP'ers also performed the feminine aspect of their motherhood in their public protests. Some carried white paper doves, others flowers, many carried their young children, draped with placards like "Let me Flower" (Swerdlow 97). They incorporated symbols that are traditionally associated with peace, beauty and nature. The yellow sunflower designed by an artist specifically for AMP became omnipresent on bumper stickers, date books, and pendants. The words of its slogan "War is not Healthy for Children and other Living Things" were balanced precariously on the branches of the sunflower, hand written in a child-like lettering. The femininity of these symbols was particularly striking at historically patriarchal sites where the Mothers marched –the Pentagon and the Capitol, army recruiting and draft offices.

But this feminine quality was not merely for show. In its campaign AMP found that a new type of politics was emerging that was distinct from traditional, patriarchal politics. Whether this was related to the feminine nature of its participants or to the unique content of the protest is difficult to assess. AMP had very little hierarchy, attracted new members through one to one relationships, and did not claim that they had the solution to the problem of Vietnam. This new politics had qualities that seemed to counter the competition, individuality and exclusive rationality of traditional, patriarchal politics. The tone and strategies of the group were based on female relationships. The World Mother's Day Assembly in 1970 was entitled " Girl Talk," a casual, intimate portrait of a talk that was actually quite professional and led by the prominent UN General Assembly President, Angie

Brooks. Organizing meetings to recruit new mothers to the movement were advertised as social gatherings: “We are having coffee with some of our Another Mothers from your community and hope you will be able to come... We look forward to meeting with you, mother to mother... to brainstorm together about our mutual problem” (AMP Newsletter March 19, 1970). The tone is light and friendly, even as they tackle serious political campaigns: “You can see from the enclosed press release and Newsletter that your Senator [on the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy] has not been doing his job... we call upon you to.... call on the phone at least three women in your district explaining the urgent need for such hearings.... Ask them to join this effort by calling others and asking them to do the same” (AMP Newsletter). For women who had small children or couldn’t travel for other reasons, AMP suggests other ways to bond with other mothers and work for the cause:

Some women meet informally in their own homes with their neighbors each week to write letters to their representatives in Washington. If you are one who would like to receive homework assignments on a weekly basis, let us know as we are looking into ways of doing this on a week-to-week basis with women who either individually or with friends would like to keep up this activity (AMP Newsletter 1969).

AMP’s approach to winning members is personal, unlike traditional formal politics they eschew. One newsletter describes why the group has chosen not to become an organization, but remain an association: “we work on a person to person basis.... we

need responsible, caring people like yourself who can reach out to friends to make our association known....” Their rhetoric discourages its members from thinking of themselves as traditional political subjects. In their first mailing on April 24, 1967 mailing they humbly portray themselves as “a group of worried mothers,” and frequently remind members that they are not an organization. In fact they stress that even mothers who have never been politically active can participate. One newspaper account profiles such a mother, Mrs. Billie Backer, identified only by her husband’s name. Her son, Jimmy was killed in Vietnam at age 19 and “the shock radicalized Mrs. Backer, who had never before been politically active, had seldom read a newspaper and had never even voted” (AMP Newsletter).

In a remarkable digression from traditional patriarchal politics, AMP’s early discourse does not claim to know how to solve the problem of Vietnam: “We aren’t pretending to have the answer. We are just interested in women expressing themselves and possibly making the world a better place to live” (Avedon qt. in AMP Newsletter May 1967). While their earliest publications claim that “we have no stand. We are apolitical,” their actions are directed at formal politicians through whom they assume such stands will be taken (Woodward qtd. Secrest 1967). They lobby Congress to pass specific measures around the war and send campaign contributions to the “doves” they want to be re-elected. But they do it in a way that they can claim is “apolitical” because they never ally themselves with any party or platform.⁸⁷ And they successfully stave off a hierarchical structure and resist the impulse to formalize their association. Along with their informal recruiting and

⁸⁷ This was one of the *Madres*’ organizational strategies as well. Both mothers groups realized that their only unique contribution was their identity as mothers and that if this was put at the service of a particular organized party or platform, that they would lose their voices.

“personal is the political” orientation they are able to play outside the rules of formal politics and continue to be uncompromising in their demands. They explain their non-traditional strategies as an outgrowth of their identities as mothers. Although they are political subjects, they can never separate this from their overriding identities as mothers. This identity authorizes them to speak about private issues like their children’s lives in the public forum. At the same time the group establishes its members as citizens, reminding them with bumper stickers that they are “Another Voter for Peace” (AMP archives). They also discourage the mothers from thinking of politics as “a group of men doing a job ‘back there,’” and that there is “nothing we can do to influence them” (AMP mailing August 5, 1967). So, while the group won’t specify a platform any more detailed than “peace” and “an end to the killing,” its presence in popular discourse acknowledges that mothers can make up a powerful political force. The fact that the group received wide coverage in the press suggests that they were believed to have some significant power.

Despite wide media coverage there is little attention to the contradictions that AMP embodied: a political group without a platform, formal party, or a candidate. This suggests that the mothers were able to create a space that fell between politicians --public, patriarchal, hierarchical -- and traditional mothers --private, domestic, personal. In this way they were able to escape from the rules and expectations of both of these spaces and create their own new, maternal politics. While the space was certainly created by the mothers who dared to step out, it was also sufficiently tolerated by the 1970’s public, who did not reject the group as dangerous or scandalous, but gave them a wider berth than perhaps another identity group would

have been granted. In this liminal space the mother was not required to specify a political platform and was allowed to circulate in public discourse without answering to the traditional keepers of its rules. This flexibility was rooted in a kind of experiential essentialist created discursively by the group, but also in the history of gender role constructions in the U.S. that relied heavily on biological essentialism.

WOMEN STRIKE FOR PEACE

Some mothers' groups, like the 1961 Women's Strike for Peace (WSP) group, were declared dangerous to national security and placed under FBI surveillance. The House Committee on Un-American Activities held hearings to investigate WSP and declared that the women's political inexperience made them vulnerable to abuse by enemies of the U.S.: "the proReds have moved in on our mothers and are using them for their own purposes" (Lotto qtd. in Moses and Hartmann 217-218). The Committee rebuked the women for stepping out of the private sphere and for not having the political experience to function in the public one. The two-fold critique is revealed in a Hearst columnist's 1962 anxiety that these "unsophisticated wives and mothers" were "being made dupes of by known Communists" (Lotto qtd. in Moses and Hartmann 218).

I will briefly comment on some of the patterns of Women Strike for Peace because it was the most significant women's movement to employ maternalist rhetoric in the period immediately preceding AMP. A peace group that organized formally in 1962 to oppose the ideology of the Cold War, it also ended up working against the Vietnam War but from a slightly more conservative position. Originally

organized in Washington DC for the November 1, 1961 strike, the group grew as pockets of women organized in sixty cities, with up to 50,000 women participating in the strike itself. While not explicitly organized as a mothers' group, the group frequently used maternalist rhetoric. In its desire to appeal to the average American woman who might be uncomfortable with the law breaking involved in demonstrations and draft card burning, early WSP activists did not engage in such activities. But as the war progressed WSP became more willing to aid men who were evading the draft. In their statement of conscience which was first publicized in a march to the White House and to the office of the general in charge of the selective service, they indirectly refer to their identities as mothers: "We believe that it is not we, but those who send our sons to kill and be killed, who are committing crimes..." Many WSP'ers were mothers of draft-age sons and by 1967 when the Congress voted to renew the Universal Military Training Act, WSP began publicly counseling young men about how to avoid the draft. They sent out literature to mothers that advised them to "know your son's rights" (qtd. in Swerdlow 1993 164).

Their discourse is strikingly similar to AMP's. Flyers printed in Cleveland used the heading "We Want Our Children to Live". One of their slogans, "Not Our Sons, Not Your Sons, not Their Sons," conveyed their alliance with mothers outside the U.S. and WSP members traveled to Vietnam and met with Vietnamese mothers (Swerdlow 178). At other times WSP drew more generally on their gender – the moral reform gender-- to authorize their protest: "As mothers, sisters, sweethearts and wives, we feel it is our moral responsibility to assist these brave young men who

refuse to participate in the Vietnam War because they believe it to be immoral, unjust and brutal” (WSP qtd. in Swerdlow 177).

Much like AMP, WSP’ers engaged in creative demonstrations, sometimes dressing in black, carrying coffins, picketing the homes of members of local draft boards, reading aloud the names of the American soldiers killed in Vietnam. Throughout these actions there was a subtle maternalist theme. In a 1970 protest by East Bay WSP’ers participants dressed in skeleton masks and held a “death watch.” Using almost the same language as AMP they explained that, “It is because we cherish life that we are here today....” (qtd. in Swerdlow *Women Strike* 172). One WSP’er in LA refused to let her son report for the draft physical explaining that, “I feel it is my right, my privilege and my honorable duty as a mother of three underage sons to resist and contest.... my sons being used to aid and abet an immoral, illegal and unjustified ...quagmire of human misery in Vietnam” (qtd. in Swerdlow 173).

Also like AMP, WSP flaunted their maternal identities in public letters to prominent government officials, hoping to pressure them into action. New York WSP bought space in the *New York Times* and published an open letter to Lyndon Johnson that asked “What Must we Mothers Do to Reach the Heart of Our President? ... We women gave you our sons... lovingly raised to live, to learn, to create a better world... you used them to kill and you returned 12, 269 caskets and 74,818 casualties to broken hearted mothers” (qtd. in Swerdlow 178). WSP’ers also relied on a mix of strategies from confrontation to naturalist imagery of the mother: “We will walk where you can see us.... A mother in defense of her family is not easily turned aside” (qtd. in Swerdlow 178). AMP’ers even wrote to the wives of

Senators who had voted for renewed military appropriation in 1972. The mothers apparently believed that they shared something maternal with these women whom they addressed as friends, “We were disappointed ... not to see your husband’s name listed along with those.... who voted against the \$70 billion dollar military appropriations bill” (Letter from AMP 1972).

While certainly feeding into the maternalist movement against war, one of WSP’s greatest contributions to the study of political motherhood may be the suspicion that they evoked in the U.S. government. Organizing as they did in the shadow of the McCarthy hearings, the women became the target of intelligence surveillance and were called to testify in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee in December of 1962. Their testimonies, in which they made a mockery of the cloak-and-dagger Red baiting political environment of the 1950’s and 60’s, revealed a special hostility towards women. The patriarchal Committee treated their female witnesses with a mix of paternalism and disdain. In their view women were too naïve for formal politics, were crippled by their natural inclinations towards emotion and were suspect because of their dangerous sexual energies. Their attitudes towards WSP revealed the persistence of several binaries: nature/culture, emotion/reason, and public/private. The committee’s chauvinism and hawkishness were mocked in a *Washington Post* Herblock cartoon in which a committee member rushes to his seat at the front of the hearings with, “I came in late, which was it that was Un-American –women or peace?” (Swerdlow 49).

The hearings also revealed the organizational structure of WSP, which was purposefully non-hierarchical, as AMP would later be, and ideologically permissive,

making no specific demands of its members besides a broad opposition to the arms race, another strategy employed by AMP. The HUAC hearings also revealed that this women's/ mother's group saw itself as fundamentally different from traditional male political organizations in many ways. The Committee's befuddled response to the women suggested that the old patriarchal guard would have to agree. Several authors have discussed the transcripts of the hearings and the resulting frustration and impotence of the Committee to make the WSP'ers behave in expected ways (Swerdlow, Elshtain and Tobias, Moses and Hartmann). Press reports of the several days of testimony described a celebratory atmosphere with laughter, clapping, bouquets of flowers and cooing babies. WSP had encouraged their supporters to sit in the audience, even urging them in telegrams to, "Bring your baby" (Adams 198). In short, the hearing's solemn and moralistic character was turned on its head with the entrance of this group of politicized mothers/women. There was much commentary by the WSP witnesses that HUAC's approach was all wrong because they were dealing with a female organizing strategy, which males could never understand. Several women answered questions hesitantly noting that they thought their motives would be "very hard to explain to the masculine mind" (Wilson qtd. in Swerdlow 116). They were purposefully elusive in answering questions about their organizational strategies, redefining terms that the committee members drew from traditional political structures. When asked if she were the "leader" of WSP, Dagmar Wilson replied, "People like to call me leader, I regard it more a term of endearment, or shall we say, an honorary title... I have absolutely no way of controlling.... who wishes to join the demonstrations, and the efforts that women strikers have made for

peace” (qtd. in Swerdlow 116-117). The notion that political motherhood groups were structured in ways that were distinct from male political groups is a theme that arises repeatedly through the history of twentieth century women’s groups, including AMP’s. Even the husbands of AMP mothers were sometimes critical of their grass roots, non hierarchical organizing strategies. As the husband of one AMP member commented in a 1969 *McCalls* article on AMP’s structure, “Do you know what you ladies have done? You have mastered the art of inefficiency!” (AMP Archives).

The differences between traditional patriarchal political organizing and maternal organizing have been primarily explained in two, not entirely different ways. Differences have been attributed to an essential difference between the genders themselves and/or to essential differences in ways that the genders interact with each other. The House UnAmerican Activities Committee’s treatment of the WSP’ers revealed the extent to which Committee members naively bought into essentialist constructions of women/mothers or pretended to, so that the women would behave according to these roles. As Swerdlow has insightfully commented, “The WSP’ers were portrayed as either the essential female of the species fighting like a tiger for the protection of her young, or as a clever manipulator, exercising her female wiles” (119).

Several WSP witnesses purposefully performed their motherhood roles to win points with the older, patriarchal Committee. One woman who offered to testify in front of HUAC, Carol Urner of Oregon, pointedly performed her proper motherly concerns about the potential for jail time if she refused to give the names of fellow WSP’ers: “I suppose such a refusal could lead one to ‘contempt’ and prison and

things like that.... And no mother can accept lightly even the remote possibility of separation from the family, which needs her. But mankind needs us too... ‘ ’ (Moses and Hartmann 221-222). Such commentary sought to offset indirect criticisms of the WSP’ers who were by implication, neglecting their homes and children by participating in the movement. This critique is eloquently captured in a *Washington Post* cartoon which has a Congressman obliviously asking, “Why aren’t those Women Strike for Peace women at home looking after their children?” (Parker in Swerdlow 97).

WSP’ers set the stage for AMP by proving that women (especially mothers) occupied a sacred space in public discourse. Publicly treating them as hostile witnesses reflected poorly on the HUAC who was seen as bullying defenseless women/mothers. On the other end police at demonstrations treated the WSP’ers more gently than male protestors. Some mothers had hoped to take advantage of this phenomenon by offering to be jailed in their draft-evading sons’ places. While these offers were never accepted by the U.S. government, WSP’ers who engaged in violent confrontations with police at the White House, were in fact, treated more gently than draft age males, who were severely beaten at several protests (Swerdlow 178-180). The *Madres* experienced a similar hands-off treatment in several protests in which journalists were present, with police and soldiers reminding each other to preserve the Argentina’s *imagen* or ‘image’ in front of foreign media.

NATIONALIST MOTHERS AND PATRIOTISM

An interesting juxtaposition to AMP and WSP are mothers who channel their maternal energies into nationalist projects. Appealing to the very spirit of maternity

that ostensibly moved AMP and WSP, several mothers groups, like the Women's Section of the Navy League (WSNL) and the American Gold Star mothers have formed around support for national war efforts. Both of these groups played on the construction of motherhood as a sacred duty within the nationalist framework. The WSNL ran training camps for civilian women during WWI which helped them to "perfect their traditional and sacred duties of feeding the hungry, nursing the sick and caring for the sorrowing" (Steinson 267). The American Gold Star Mothers dedicated itself to patriotism, respect for the American flag, and allegiance to the U.S. (American Gold Star Mothers).

In part because of this tradition of activist conservative mothers, several pacifist women's groups have gone to great lengths to establish their own patriotism when challenging their states. The charge of betrayal to one's nation was one to which outspoken women/mothers were particularly vulnerable. The House UnAmerican Activities Committee seemed to recognize this when, on the third day of testimony, they went to great lengths to be respectful of Dagmar Wilson, wife of the cultural attaché at the British embassy. After much negative press regarding their treatment of the women on the first two days, the Committee emphasized that they "recognize that there are many, many women, in fact a great, great majority of women in this peace movement who are absolutely patriotic and absolutely adverse to everything the Communist Party stands for" (qtd. in Swerdlow 117).

Much like the dictatorship's view of the *Madres*, AMP's adversaries in the Nixon, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations, considered anti-Vietnam war groups as more than just a nuisance. Their activities posed an ideological threat to U.S.

identity and hegemony. One historian of the period notes that AMP “in many ways posed a more serious political threat to the White House than 200,000 demonstrating college students who had never voted and did not belong to political parties” (Small 56). The FBI surveillance of many groups active against the Vietnam War and the HUAC hearings themselves indicate just how seriously such protests were viewed (Echols 8). Many of these groups were vulnerable to charges of disloyalty to the U.S. but AMP showed how motherhood was an effective trump card. As Mrs. Billie Backer explained after the death of her son in Vietnam, “I love my son more than I love my flag or my country and I would lie down and die for any of my children before I would let them give up their lives for President Nixon and the other politicians who are asking us to survive through this tragedy...” (Backer). Much like the *Madres*, AMP argued rhetorically that their positions as mothers gave them special authority: “I realize that I have a commitment in this world to make the lives of my children safer and happier,” wrote an AMP member. Their discourse grounded their identities in their natural and biological roles as mothers: “As women, meticulous in our regard for life, should we not demand more seriousness and higher purpose, on this single occasion [Mother’s Day]... that presumes to celebrate our human capacity to deliver life into the world?” (Gittleston 1969). In a more premeditated strategy one columnist notes that, “Another Mother for Peace officially says it is every woman’s duty to put one question on the lips of every single American: ‘Are our sons dying for off-shore oil?’” (McGrory 1971). But AMP was careful to guard against a maternalism that tread too heavily on national symbols. In defense of her national identity Mrs. Backer stresses that, “It’s not that I’m against

America... It's just that I'm against war by any government" (1970). AMP also clarifies that its position against the war does not extend to criticizing young men who have been drafted or chosen to fight: "Another Mother for Peace recognizes the fact that a vote against war appropriations is not a vote against the young men serving in Vietnam. It is, rather, a vote designed to bring these young men home and to prevent hundreds of thousands more from being sent into a bottomless pit" (1968). AMP's attitudes towards the U.S. flag, U.S. soldiers, and U.S. foreign policy are all carefully couched in terms that criticize while they assert their loyalty.

In addition to redefining nationalism, AMP tries to wrest the meanings of "citizen" and "patriot" from the hegemonic lexicon.⁸⁸ Beyond being labeled non-women or bad mothers, their greatest vulnerability was in being depicted as disloyal. In the shadow of the 1954 McCarthy Hearings, AMP had to be careful to prevent public discourse from becoming polarized into Americans and Communists. The public outcry against Jane Fonda for her campaign against the Vietnam War, which included 1972 pictures of her poised on North Vietnamese tanks in Hanoi, was an example of how well-meaning protesters could take missteps that damaged their entire message. Fonda was widely ridiculed as a traitor and a Communist in the press when she was seen visiting American POWs and making broadcasts on Vietnamese radio.⁸⁹ To avoid such reactions, AMP intentionally touted its allegiance to the U.S. One article in the *Los Angeles Times* opens with a description of AMP's office in

⁸⁸ Cindy Sheehan uses the term "matriot" instead of "patriot" to describe herself. Sheehan defines: "A Matriot loves his/her country but does not buy into the exploitive phrase of 'My country right or wrong'"

⁸⁹ Fonda discusses these events in her new book, *My Life So Far*, 2005. She is very regretful of the harm she may have caused US GI's whom she visited in prison and were later killed, in part for passing her notes.

Beverly Hills where “A large American flag decorates the donated office suite ...where women are working six days a week and nights...” One of the authors of the movement, Barbara Avedon is quoted as saying, “The Flag is here because it’s our Flag and we’re Americans and we’re proud of it. We are not a protest movement. We are an assent movement” (Lilliston). In the same breathe that she is wholeheartedly American, Avedon claims to speak in the most general terms, for mothers’ everywhere: “Every mother in the world wants peace talks”(Lilliston). While such statements may seem a little simplistic they were coupled with other sophisticated organizing strategies like research on off-shore oil drilling in SE Asia and direct lobbying of formal politicians in Washington, D.C.

TESTIMONIALS

Some AMP mothers were able to defend any charges of disloyalty by taking on the voices of their missing sons. Some of these sons had been killed in Vietnam, or could not speak for themselves because they were still fighting in Vietnam or were legal minors. Mothers who had lost sons obviously had the most impact, with numerous mothers coming forward to tell of their grief. One poignant photo from a march at the White House shows a mother wearing a large placard that reads, “My Son Died in Vain in Vietnam” (Swerdlow 158). Other mothers took on their sons’ voices, a move that is difficult to challenge in public given the delicacy with which grieving mothers are treated. In a particularly poignant case a mother had a letter that her son had written to her before he was shipped overseas (to be opened only in case of his death in Vietnam). Keith Franklin, killed in Vietnam in 1970 writes that,

“if you are reading this letter, you will never see me again. ... The question is now whether or not my death has been in vain. My answer is yes.... So as I lie dead, please grant my last request. Help me to inform the American people, the silent majority who have not yet voiced their opinions... my death will not be in vain if by prompting them to act I can in some way help to bring an end to the war that brought an end to my life” (Franklin).

Other mothers had less direct evidence of their lost sons’ attitudes but they were no less shy about representing their sons’ opinions: “I don’t think that my son did [believe in the Vietnam War] ...” reported Mrs. Billie Backer of her son, Jimmy. She translates his conviction into her own actions: “He has died for peace. I will live for peace” (1970).

Accounts of the war sent back by Americans fighting there were powerful tools in shaping public opinion about the conflict. Testimonials are first person accounts that involve a pledge to the truth of the account, which is probably assumed in the case of these letters from the battlegrounds. Most of these letters meet the criteria for testimonials – involve a condition of urgency like war, and are considered as representative of the experience of a group of people –other U.S. soldiers--who share common characteristics (Beverly). While such letters are undeniably powerful as direct accounts, many AMP mothers who had lost sons did not possess such clear evidence of their son’s attitudes towards the war. Still many reported about their sons’ ambivalence or hesitance towards the war, which produced a kind of testimonial

effect in readers. Because of the mother-son bond, the lost soldiers seem to speak through their mothers' voices and activism, in effect speaking even after their deaths. Some of these mothers went further than AMP itself did in using their sons' voices to make political statements about the conflict. One mother, Mrs. Louise Ransom, declared after her son, Mike's, death in Vietnam that "My son would have died for freedom but he died for a government that is suppressing it." Mrs. Ransom even remarked in an interview with Mary McGrory that "'No one can argue with me' says Mrs. Ransom, her blue eyes mildly flashing, and she recalls the draft-center rally, where she was chained to a resister, where even the hard-hats stopped booing, when she spoke to them of her credentials to be heard" (McGrory 1970).

These grieving mothers' own testimonials of their grief and loss were powerful weapons in the rhetoric against the war. As Philippe LeJeune argues, narrators who are non-professional (as AMP emphasizes) are considered as more trustworthy to audiences because they are believed not to have an agenda. Many of the AMP mothers who told their stories in testimonial form emphasized their lack of an agenda. Peg Mullen's testimonial, *Unfriendly Fire: A Mother's Memoir* will be examined in the next chapter for this quality. Other mothers noted that they had never been involved politics, were not comfortable marching in public, and had gotten involved only reluctantly when the war intruded on their private lives. For testimonial purposes their lack of political experience gave mothers more credibility.

For scholars of testimonials such explicit claims to political naiveté may be a warning. LeJeune, for example, claims that we should be especially wary of testimonials from people who are illiterate --because they are often considered to be

incapable of hidden agendas. I would extend this warning to people who claim ignorance of cultural and political symbolism, as AMP implies in their claims to be a non-political organization. Their careful discursive negotiation of feminism, nationalism, and essentialism reveals them to be quite sophisticated students of formal politics. In various self-representations --testimonials in particular, but also in interviews by newspapers and magazines-- their disclaimers about their political status and intentions should make readers consider their motives more closely rather than less. As one AMP member, Jan Shuntun, put it, "We are all a bunch of women who have never done anything like this before" (Bigelman). But cultural constructions of mothers in the U.S. are more likely to lead audiences to sympathize with them than to critique them. Mothers are guardians of morality, not manipulators; emotional beings, not reason-based plotters; private creatures not public spin doctors; and most of all, they are relationship-oriented, not prone to violating the trust of relationships through deceit. Because of these constructions it is much more difficult to imagine a mother manipulating the story of her dead son for political advantage than an elected official in Congress whose career revolves around traditionally patriarchal norms: public life, aggression, reason, independence. The construction of U.S. mothers with these special characteristics, and AMP's intentional juxtaposition of these qualities with those involved in formal political movements, had to effect of constructing the mothers as highly reliable testimonial informants. They were less likely to be misrepresenting their experiences than other informants might be. And they were particularly qualified to give an account based on a unique episteme: maternal emotions, and familial and community relationships. I will call this

discursive phenomenon the “testimonial effect.” Although mothers may not be any more likely to tell the truth in testimonial accounts, they are read by audiences –much like illiterate subjects -- as more reliable witnesses. I will explore this dynamic in more detail in chapter four in my discussion of Peg Mullen’s widely published *Unfriendly Fire: A Mother’s Memoir*.

One of the many advantages that AMP enjoyed because of the testimonial effect, their claim to be a non-political movement, and cultural respect for mothers was that many of the contradictions in their movement were not carefully analyzed. These contradictions appear on several levels and belie the activities of a political group under the guise a group of “innocent” mothers. In one interview Joanne Newman (Woodward) seems genuinely surprised that several of her bumpstickers, “War is not Healthy for Children and other Living Things,” had been torn off her car. She seems shocked and injured by the attack: “I don’t know how anyone could criticize that statement” (Secret). She argues that, “[AMP] has no stand. We are apolitical.” This could be genuine naiveté or a feigned feminine ignorance that could disarm her primarily male critics. The latter seems more likely as AMP was simultaneously researching the oil trade journals and consulting with experts at Berkley and Stanford Universities to understand the history and economics of SE Asia. These strategies were not ones developed by women who could not see their adversaries’ positions.

AMP mastered the art of politicking in the non-political space they had created but their messages were not without contradiction. While the American mothers promoted transnational discourse with Vietnamese mothers it also argued

that Americans at home were paying the price of the Vietnam War with a neglect of domestic needs. “While our sons have been sent out to the jungles of the world to fight the enemy....we choke in our cities, our tax money is spent on nerve gas...millions of [American] children go to bed hungry every night,our cities are burning and we are devoting our national resources to napalm for the straw huts of Indochina!” (AMP newsletter June 1970). Paradoxically the transnational message that AMP sent to Vietnamese mothers is presented alongside a domestic one that says, let’s focus on our own people, Americans. The presence of such contradictions suggests that AMP was more complex than the naïve, truth-speaking subjects that some of their material depicts. In this case AMP was clearly speaking strategically to different audiences with a common goal: ending the war. Their methods obviously go beyond simple, transparent testimonials, as the mothers studied the motives of their diverse audiences for clues about how to win their support.

Another example is seen in their sophisticated approach to numerous private companies who were stakeholders in the Vietnam War, manufacturing products that directly or indirectly contributed to the war effort. In their June 1970 newsletter entitled, “You Don’t have to Buy War Mrs. Smith,” AMP singles out several brand names that “should be familiar to us homemaker-consumers”: General Motors, Dow Chemical, Whirlpool and General Electric. It calls on these companies to “get out of the war business” and on mothers to boycott these products. Echoing the tropes of World War II posters, AMP reminded corporations that, “War profits are without honor in this desperate time!” At the same time that they were publicly pressuring these companies to pull back from the war, they were using the domestic identities of

many of their members to hook them into this campaign. If many political women couldn't or wouldn't leave their private homes for public debate, AMP would bring the public into the private: "We just want to bring the military industrial complex into their homes"(McGrory 1970). They recognized that many of their members would be familiar with the soaps, shampoos and detergents from these companies so they could tap into the second wave personal-is-the-political trend by confronting mothers/women with their purchasing choices. At the same time, the focus on domestic responsibilities enabled AMP to show that they were not radical feminists but housewives and mothers, just like many of their homebound sympathizers. In a particularly creative play on cleaning products, AMP led its June 1967 newsletter with the following paragraph:

There's a DOVE in every kitchen. The TIDE has turned –and there is a BOLD DASH out of the IVORY tower of theory into the ACTION arena of working for peace. Forgive all the soft soap but the kids, our marvelous exciting kids in their 'Stay Clean for Gene' dazzling job in the nation's first primary, demonstrated conclusively that the idea that the people are behind our Vietnam policy is all washed up. Shelves are getting crowded with new 'cleaning products.' Let's welcome all new additions to the peace market. We've got months before November to test all the brands. And the Spring cleaning has just begun!

Alongside its focus on domestic identities and the personal impact that very ordinary housewives could have, AMP reminds its members that their humble efforts are having an impact on national politics. They demystify the political process for newly-activist members, reminding them that Lyndon B. Johnson's historic decision not to seek or accept the nomination for President was the result of their democratic efforts. "It is your proof (if you ever doubted it) that your actions shape events" (June 1968). In addition AMP shows its members that their purchases of small household products have implications for national politics. Patriarchal politics have traditionally been dominated by the voices of big businesses with powerful representation in Washington DC. AMP's cleaning products campaign linked big business to small, domestic purchases, frequently done by women and mothers. Bess Myerson, in her position as the director of Consumer Affairs for New York City and a prominent member of AMP, was instrumental in conveying this message to women. She even produced a film entitled, "You Don't Have to Buy War Mrs. Smith," which I will examine in Chapter four.

CONCLUSION

AMP was able to disseminate many paradoxical messages about its mission and its messengers: mothers embody the moral strength of the private sphere but they can speak in public without losing that status; mothers are patriots but can criticize their government publicly; mothers are not professional or formal politicians but they can challenge government "experts" on matters of national security, economics and law; mothers are emotional beings but possess strong rational capabilities as well;

women, particularly mothers, are essentially different from others but they should have equal voices in the public sphere. How did AMP mothers get away with these contradictory claims? Here is where several traditional constructions of motherhood have worked to their advantage. The image of the grieving mother is almost a sacred one. Attacking a grieving mother who claims to be apolitical can be greatly damaging to a politician, especially a male one who can appear insensitive and bullish.⁹⁰ In part this is because of the status that such mothers have gained through the construction of the mother as a national asset and a part of the national narrative. Also, patriarchal traditions have constructed mothers as private citizens --family is a private issue; and as moral beacons --war is certainly a moral issue. This combination of factors made mothers uniquely suited to commenting on issues like a war that impacts their children. Without these traditions these mothers might not have been so successful in securing uncontested political space

Many of the seemingly paradoxical messages that AMP disseminated were attempts to fend off attacks that might have weakened their movements. They claimed that there were plenty of traditional, domestic, feminine mothers in the movement, so as not to alienate conservative mothers. But they also showed sensitivity to the burgeoning women's movement with their awareness of the objectification of women as sex symbols. They argued that members could be family-oriented or career-oriented. They could be outspoken public marchers or discreet, home-based letter writers. They were independent minded women but frequently went by their husbands' full names and often disassociated themselves

⁹⁰ President Bush was put in such a position by activist Cindy Sheehan, who camped outside Bush's Texas ranch for weeks after her son, Casey, was killed in Iraq.

from the cause of feminism. They were emotional beings but not hysterics, and always rational subjects. While their weeping echoed the traditional *mater dolorosa*, it also concealed anger, which they channeled into action. They argued that they were not a political movement because they had no partisan ties or hierarchical organization. But they worked behind the scenes to influence the votes of formal politicians and organized in powerful yet informal grass roots ways. When they encountered vulnerabilities, they shored them up with redefinitions of key terms: nationalism, citizenship, and patriotism.

Contradictions such as those above would have been exploited in any other movement. But AMP's identity as a mothers' group gave them a measure of protection that allowed their discourse more leeway. The group's inception in the middle of the second wave of feminism benefited its growth in several ways. Discourse around women's changing roles was already circulating and AMP was able to take advantage of this. The "personal is the political" wave authorized their right to have an opinion about the war even though they had no professional training. They were careful, however, to include women who would not have considered themselves feminists and who, perhaps, considered the second wave to be too radical. Motherhood was constructed as a space in which women of different political orientations, and attitudes towards feminism, could come together. The very experience of mothering --giving birth and/or raising children-- served as a basis for a common identity. As I have argued before the "essence" of motherhood is an experiential one --mothers end up sensing an affinity with other mothers because they have developed similar emotional patterns and strategies of interacting with the

world: reading emotions, patience, flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity (Ruddick). Since these patterns are so intimate and may appear to develop “naturally,” many outsiders to maternalist groups will describe them as such. The historical association of women with nature and men with culture contributes to this effect. Even mothers themselves, for lack of better language, fall into this pattern. The fact that mothers who have adopted children develop the same behavior patterns and experience the same devotion to their children as biological mothers suggests that these are learned rather than “natural.”

Women’s groups who have tried to employ maternalist rhetoric have sensed the gap that exists between the experience of motherhood and its public construction as a nationalist identity. N. Wilson refers to this as the difference between mothering and motherhood. In terms of identity construction for the purpose of political action, I have termed this “experiential” versus “proscriptive” essentialism. In the case of Vietnam, AMPers were extremely conscious of this gap and sought to represent themselves in their own words and images, as did the *Madres* in Argentina. The use of poetry, narratives and letters, which lend themselves more to emotional expression, is evidence of this trend. Additionally, their attention to redefining terms in public discourse shows that they wanted to rebuild the image of motherhood on their own framework – in terms that reflected the diversity of mothers’ experiences. The timing of the movement during the second wave of feminism was fortuitous since public discourse around definitions of gender roles was already active. Many women were already looking to their personal lives to see how they made political statements, so such reflection was not new. The second wave’s attention to race, class, and

nationality had made many women reflect on their multiple subjectivities, another boon for AMP, which had to recruit many women who had reservations about becoming “activists.” At the same time, AMP was reluctant to associate itself with feminism, even though many of its members, again like the *Madres*, were experiencing personal transformations in their identities. They kept their focus on the War and the best way to do this was to keep their positions as traditional, domestic, feminine mothers who were only moved to public action when their children were threatened. In the process, they enacted a new type of politics, which they publicly attributed to their essential maternal qualities: emotionality, devotion to the private sphere, nurturing, and patience. Because of these qualities, they explained, their way of doing politics was different from patriarchal styles. AMP was non-hierarchical, emotional, imaginative, inclusive, social, and flexible. This external form disguised components that could also be traced to maternal roots but were far less attractive to political opponents: anger, tireless devotion, boundless creativity, disregard for decorum or tradition. They used these weapons to break into the public sphere, circumvent traditional political rules and authorize their discourse around the Vietnam War.

Although AMP was never labeled a radical group, several other anti-war groups had already occupied those spaces –including the maternalist, Women Strike for Peace—they played an important role in the anti-War movement. They recruited large numbers of women who did not want to march publicly or become activists, but who were opposed to the War –500,000 women subscribed to their newsletter by 1978. They got these women to write to their representatives in Washington DC, to

hold coffee talks in their houses, to boycott war-profit companies' products, all of which influenced the discourse around the War. While AMP was represented in the media as a relatively well-behaved group the extent of their coverage suggests that they held power that went much deeper than this image. Clearly their choice of identity positions tapped a current of powerful ambivalence around motherhood in political and social circles. At some level they all acknowledged the potential power that a group of indignant mothers could have, especially when it came to the lives of their children.

In many ways AMP members were good students of history. They learned from the female moral reform movement that private women could break into the public sphere if their issues were sufficiently moral in nature. If they involved children, mothers could tap into biological essentialism, which authorized their voices further. At the same time they could keep their membership open and diverse by employing essentialism based on experience not biology inside their group. They had successfully learned from the second wave of feminism that identity politics that were not inclusive would destroy their own movements. Although AMP did not reach out significantly to African American mothers, their membership did include other types of diversity: urban/rural, religious/secular, feminist/traditionalist. AMP was also savvy about the power of nationalist motherhood and took pains to define themselves as properly patriotic and loyal to the state. They were also willing to perform domestic, feminine, traditional motherhood for specific audiences. While their rhetoric claimed that they were apolitical, their campaigns and strategies suggested otherwise. They enacted a politics that was qualitatively and organizationally

different but with the same intensity and discipline as traditional politics. Even better, it was disguised as a “natural” outgrowth of motherhood.

CHAPTER FOUR

Mothers to the Nation? Familial Conflict over Vietnam

The modern state is the natural enemy to the values of kinship, especially among the upper classes, for kinship is a direct threat to the state's own claim to prior loyalty.

Lawrence Stone, *The Family in History*

To compliment my discourse analysis of *Another Mother for Peace* in Chapter 3, I have chosen several texts that contribute to understanding diverse constructions of political motherhood during the Vietnam era. Two novels, two testimonials, one docudrama, and three documentary films all contribute uniquely to my understanding of the phenomenon of the politicized mother and its challenge to the public/private split. The novels, *Vida* by Marge Piercy and *A Walking Fire* by Valerie Miner, serve to illuminate in more depth many of the challenges that *Another Mother for Peace* faced but which are not revealed by an analysis of their public rhetoric. The fictional conventions of the omniscient narrator and access to characters' internal monologues allow readers to experience the contradictions and conflicts of the political mother in more detail. They allow a closer view of the family/state conflict that is so central to the ambivalence around the political mother.

Three of my texts are quite distinct versions of the same story. A testimonial, a journalistic account and a docudrama all tell the story of the Mullen family and powerfully illuminate the challenges that the political mother faced during Vietnam. The contrast of the three genres allows us to view one family's story through multiple lenses, capturing a more holistic representation of their experience and the conflicts of the era. Peg Mullen's account is called *Unfriendly Fire: A Mother's Memoir*, while

the journalistic account (by C.D.B. Bryan) and the film are both called *Friendly Fire*.⁹¹

Finally, I will examine three documentaries that represent or speak to political mothers during the Vietnam War. “Another Family for Peace,” made by a Quaker group, “You Don’t Have to Buy War, Mrs. Smith,” produced by AMP and “Why Vietnam?” a propaganda piece put out by the Department of Defense, starring President Lyndon Johnson. Each one contributes a unique perspective on political motherhood in the Vietnam era and social attitudes towards the conflict between the family and the state.

The trope of the politicized mother during the Vietnam War is one that is found in numerous American texts and films in the 1970s. From Peg Mullen’s personal account of losing her son in *Unfriendly Fire*, to Marge Piercy’s story of underground resistance in *Vida*, the politicized mother is at the center of several social and historical forces. She occupies a space at the juncture of the public and the private, the domestic and the national, the family and the state. In doing so, she problematizes several paradigms that have structured U.S. beliefs about these binaries for centuries. The most central one is the role of the family with respect to the nation-state. The modern nuclear family is one that has been constructed in opposition to the public state and represents a harbor of privacy from state intervention. The fourth amendment, which protects the “right of people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures”, is frequently cited in legal privacy cases. A 1980 Supreme Court ruling explained that “physical entry of

⁹¹ “Friendly fire” is a military term for the accidental firings of troops on their own soldiers. The Mullen’s son, Michael, was killed in Vietnam in this way.

the home is the chief evil against which the wording of the Fourth Amendment is directed,” and argued that “overriding respect for the sanctity of the home... has been embedded in our traditions since the origins of the Republic” (Payton vs. New York). Numerous other rulings by the Court cite the private sphere of the home as one that must be protected from intrusion by the public state. Given that the sphere of the private –family, child-raising, mothering, relationships—have been intimately connected to womanhood/motherhood, the state’s intrusion on that sphere is a direct attack on these identities. Whether the state moves inward on the private sphere, as in the Argentine case, or mothers move outward into the public one, as in the Vietnam case, mothers’ “private” interests are bound to clash with the state’s interests. The model of the private family constructed against the public state has been challenged by the Right and Left who have proposed alternative notions of family, particularly during the Vietnam era. During this period, much of the activist Left saw the nuclear family as bourgeois and materialistic, dismissing it as an archaic model. Alternative communities based on group living arrangements, communal child-care and shared ideology were popular among many anti-war groups who saw these as the future of the “family.” On the Right the notion that the nation-state was a larger family, to which the nuclear family was subordinate, was popular with Cold War ideologues. Allegiance to the state meant obedience to the family –usually ruled by patriarchal values. This created stability in the production of subjects loyal to the state. As legal theorist Shelley Wright contends, “the modern nation state requires intense levels of conformity in order to operate successfully. Even the introduction of democratic institutions does not necessarily rid states of this need for ‘manufactured consent;

where it cannot be coerced” (57). Within each of these paradigms shifting constructions of gender roles, patriarchy, religion and the private/public split, illuminate the extent to which the nation-state relies on the stability of the nuclear family to maintain hegemony. At the center of these shifting currents is the politicized mother.

The politicized mother exposed a weakness of the Right’s model of the national family in this era by asserting that the nuclear family sometimes had interests that opposed those of the state: keeping their sons alive was the most obvious one during the Vietnam era. The political mother also revealed the fallacy of the public/private divide by bringing “private” issues into the “public” sphere and positing themselves as political subjects, rather than private, domestic ones. The Right often embraced the notion that all issues were public (read moral) and should be decided at the level of the nation. These trends closely paralleled those observed around the *Madres*, although the Argentine experience was more extreme. Nonetheless, the Right viewed the U.S. nuclear family as an ideological building block of the nation, interpolated by the dynamics of patriarchy. It affirms the theory that Shelley Wright develops in her historical analysis of the legal treatment of socially deviant women, “The nation-state is also built on deeply patriarchal institutional structures and mental attitudes” (57).

Although the U.S. draft did reach into the private sphere in requiring military service, conscription was considered part of the contract of male citizenship. There were few formal challenges to the legitimacy of this requirement.⁹² More frequently,

⁹² There were exceptions, of course, like Evelyn Whitehorn, who sued to free her son from service in Vietnam. He was jailed for refusing to serve but then ultimately went to Vietnam to avoid further jail

maternalist anti-war rhetoric attacked the legitimacy of the state to invoke the draft given that the Vietnam conflict was undeclared and casualty counts were underreported. But on the whole the draft, itself, was not rhetorically constructed as a violation of the private sphere. More commonly, tensions about the violation of the private/public divide were turned inward on the family itself. It was relationships within the private family that were strained by male members' public allegiance to the state. In two of my texts, *Vida* and *A Walking Fire*, families are torn apart by disagreements over how to respond to the state's demand for military service. In three more texts, *And Another Family for Peace*, *Unfriendly Fire: A Mother's Memoir*, and *Why Vietnam?*, families experience tensions around how gender roles construction serves the state's interest in conformity and consent in its citizenry, while threatening private, emotional relationships. Much like Diana Taylor's analysis of the patriarchal quality of the Argentine military regime and its roots in the cultural history of *machismo* and the political history of the *caudillos*, legal scholar Shelley Wright contends that in the U.S., "Socialized masculinity is heterosexual, conformist and obedient to authority...The militarist values associated with citizenship and entitlement to rights is a foundational principal of modern, liberal democracy" (80). In other words, male citizens must also be soldiers if they want to enjoy the rights of citizenship.

The Right was more than willing to resurrect traditional gender roles to shuttle such women back into the domestic sphere, which it paradoxically argued was properly "private." On the other hand, the Left's answer to the traditional nuclear

time (Swerdlow *Women Strike for Peace* 174-175). According to the American Friends Service Committee website, just over 200,000 young men were formerly accused of violating draft laws during Vietnam.

family in the 1960s was inadequate. The Left's very disregard for traditional social norms left women at the mercy of male aggression in activist groups. The absence of structure in such groups left mothers without the support they needed to be politically active and care for children. Finally, its experimental families revealed the harm that can come from dismissing the private sphere and politicizing all relations. Women in the texts I review in this chapter are deprived of the emotional intimacy and protection that the healthy family unit offers. In the end "family" groups based on ideology are revealed as inferior to the bonds of the nuclear family.

Exploring my U.S. texts through the lens of political motherhood and the implications it has for the structure of the family reveals another important influence: patriarchy. The texts reveal that the ideology and relationships of both the Left and the Right are profoundly shaped by this force. In this way the two poles actually share a trend: both the Right and the Left use patriarchal paradigms to push mothers back into the domestic realm when they become too political. In the rhetoric of the Right such mothers will better serve the family of the nation by raising citizens devoted to the state. Their emotional natures are also more compatible with the tasks of child-rearing. Although less publicly acknowledged the Left also pushes mothers out of the political sphere. They are better guided to support tasks in political action than to leadership because of the burdens of childcare and their emotional fragility.

THE FAMILY AND THE STATE

The struggle between the state and the family for the allegiance of members is one that has taken diverse forms throughout history. The strength of citizens' bonds to their states (or kingdoms) and to their families (extended or nuclear) has varied

greatly according to economic, religious and political patterns. These patterns have important implications for the role of motherhood as a political force because they influence the way that the mother is understood as a private or public identity.

The mother who enacts this identity as a political role must challenge patriarchy in two distinct spaces: public and private. In the public sphere she must oppose patriarchal institutions like military forces, government administrations, and media corporations. In the private sphere her greatest struggle may be with her own father, husband or brother. These male family members may have been constructed to see allegiance to the state as essential to their masculinity and so the rebellion of female members may threaten their own gender identities.

As I have shown in earlier chapters, times of armed conflict or state sponsored repression often bring maternal roles and nationalist ones into conflict. They force mothers to negotiate overlapping identities of citizen and family member. This process reveals much about the relationship of the family to the state and the nature of the bonds that we forge to these two institutions. Although emotion bonds people to the state and to the family, the way in which each institution views its members is distinct. While the family values its members for their “intrinsic individual worth” (Reiss) the state values its’ members primarily as economic units, for their “capital accumulation and production” (Wright, 56). In the case of the modern, nuclear family, private ties to other members are based primarily upon affection, at least in comparison with pre-modern kinship bonds, which were

motivated more by economics.⁹³ The state also attempts to inspire emotional loyalty in its members, stressing values like honor, duty and sacrifice for a common cause. These emotions serve in part to disguise the primarily economic orientation of the state to its citizens. “Nationalism refocused tribalism on to the nation-state and treated lingering loyalty to sub or supra-state entities as treasonous” (Wright 64).

While the emotion inspired by the state may seem very public in form—military service, parades, pledges of allegiance-- it also requires profound changes in the relations of the private sphere. Family allegiances must be made secondary to public ones. In the U.S. this process is facilitated socially and historically by the polarization of gender roles and puts the mother-child bond at the service of the state’s interests. Ruptures occur when women have refused such polarization of roles (the second wave of feminism, for example) or when citizens have seriously questioned the legitimacy of their nation’s military involvement (such as the Vietnam War).

All of the Vietnam era texts that I explore treat the intersection of the family and the state, and the private and the public, as disrupted by the War. Through them we can see more clearly the extent to which the modern, nation state depends upon the patriarchal, nuclear family to keep its citizens loyal. We can also observe that women (particularly mothers) tend to choose the family unit over the state, which often causes conflict with the patriarchal character of the nuclear family. Fathers are inculcated to privilege loyalty to the state of which the family is considered as a subset. It appears that fathers more easily reconcile the sacrifice of family to the

⁹³ In the pre-modern era there was a great deal of nepotism in employment and cousins—at least in the upper class—were frequently mated to other cousins in order to maintain the family dominance over finances. For more see Stone and Reiss.

larger project of the state. These dynamics have important implications for the stability of the state and its power to dominate domestic relationships. I observe that as mothers are less willing to submit to patriarchal familial dynamics, they are more willing to challenge the hegemony of the state.

To understand how these processes functioned in the U.S. during the 1960s, we must look at the history of the American nuclear family. Much like motherhood, we may think of the family as a “natural” body but the family unit is one that is shaped by several forces that have influenced its composition and relationships over centuries. Looking back to the British origins of the American family, the new nation state of the sixteenth century required increased allegiance from its citizens, encouraged by official propaganda that stressed the need for authority and obedience. To bolster its own power, the state de-emphasized the strength of aristocratic kinship and highlighted the role of the patriarch in the conjugal unit. In effect citizens were to direct their loyalty to the state, which put a representative in place in every family in the form of the patriarch (Stone 24-25).

The Protestant reformation of the sixteenth century also influenced the rise of the nuclear family with its emphasis on companionate married life as the ideal condition for Christians –as opposed to medieval Catholicism, which focused on chastity for all its members, aside from procreation. Protestantism gave more support to the nuclear family as it encouraged marriage for all and thought of sex as a normal part of an affectionate marriage. It also supported the idea of marriage as a freely chosen partnership, based on attraction and affection, rather than a business transaction based on kinship ties and economics (Stone 27).

The Reformation also moved the moral control of the community (prayers, morality, confession, reading the Bible) from the parish priest to the household patriarch. This shift paralleled a change in property control from community control over shared property –by aristocratic patronage—to control by smaller conjugal units, headed by a patriarch. It also accompanied a shift in economic production to the center of the family life –the home. All of these factors resulted in a rise in patriarchal power in the seventeenth century in which “decisionsabout political power fell under the more or less exclusive control of the patriarchal nuclear family as the ancient controls of custom, community, kin and patron fell away” (Stone 33-43). As married women were further removed from the protection of their extended kin they were more vulnerable to exploitation. But, at the same time, they tended to be in marriages that were based more on affection between spouses, rather than purely economic benefit. Paradoxically, as Lawrence Stone points out, this made women even more submissive to their husbands: “the demand for married love itself facilitated the subordination of wives. Women were expected to love and cherish their husbands after marriage and were taught that it was their sacred duty to do so” (53).

Since Protestantism is frequently cited as the strongest moral influence on American family, the trends that began in the nuclear family of England were no doubt carried to the colonies on the waves of migration. Historians disagree on the extent to which strong extended family ties ever really existed in the U.S. except among the upper class.⁹⁴ The migration of families from the East to the West and

⁹⁴ While some may see the American nuclear family as a relatively recent development, sociologist Ira L. Reiss argues that the extended family structure in the U.S. was never the norm, except among the upper class. Migration patterns, the influence of Protestantism, and the anti-aristocratic nature of the

from rural to urban settings within the U.S. made it unlikely that many extended family structures survived in the form that they did in Europe. These migrations preceded even the industrial revolution, which is commonly cited as the chief factor in the break up of the extended kinship structure and its reduction to the nuclear family (Reiss 265-66). So its European legacy, along with the demands of migration and the Protestant influence, seems to have made the American family particularly nuclear in character and patriarchal in outlook. These components put it on a collision course with the increasing demands of the modern nation state for allegiance. “The modern nation state attempted to focus attention on an individual subject only to the control and construction of the state itself defined increasingly on nationalist groups” (Wright 64). The political mother becomes the locus of these tensions when she privileges her emotional connection to her children over her (and their) allegiance to the state and in so doing challenges the patriarchal nature of the modern family.

All of the narratives I have chosen provide different insights into how private maternal bonds challenged the hegemony of the state during the Vietnam War. While public protest was the most obvious part of this dynamic, these narratives show us how the patriarchal nuclear family in the U.S. has been set up to absorb the tension and moral conflict around military intervention through its reification of rigid gender roles and the affirmation of the public/private split. While it is too reductive to say that the state designed these dynamics with this specific result in mind, the promotion of patriarchy and the encouragement of the private/public split by the state certainly created conditions in which it could use relations within the nuclear family (i.e.

U.S. made some form of the nuclear family the norm in the U.S. for several hundred years. Also, see Lawrence Stone.

patriarchal dominance) to further a nationalist agenda. When confronted with the politicized mother, the state has resorted to several strategies that reveal its preference for the traditional patriarchal, nuclear structure: shaming women/mothers back to their proper roles with critiques of their sexuality, encouraging women's embrace of the domestic sphere, and making allegiance to family synonymous with allegiance to the state. Many of these strategies are evident in AMP's rhetoric, which constructs its members as feminine, domestic, and appropriately sexualized. Behind these moves is a clear message that without the stability of the maternal subject (loyal to patriarchal ideals), the state cannot dominate the family, whose bonds are stronger than those of the "imagined community" of the state.⁹⁵

Two trends in the 1960s and 1970s problematized traditional mores around sexuality and questioned the traditional structure of the nuclear family: the advent of the birth control pill and the growth in alternative family structures. The birth control pill freed middle class women from bearing large numbers of children and spending most of their adult lives raising them. Middle class women at least, were able to consider careers after or during child rearing, a move that pushed them into the public sphere in larger numbers. Experiments with alternative family groups sought to deconstruct traditional gender roles and allowed women/mothers to be less isolated in their domestic, child raising experiences. In these settings child-care became more of a public experience than a private one.

In both of these cases the patriarchal split between the private and the public was blurred and the very private nature of motherhood in the middle class nuclear

⁹⁵ Benedict Anderson argues that the modern nation state is a built upon the "imagined community" of other citizens, with whom we may have little in common culturally, linguistically or ethnically. Despite this, if we buy into the propaganda of the state, we will be willing to die for these people.

family was problematized. Communal living models challenged the necessity that motherhood be as private as it had been in the middle class nuclear family –mothers living in isolation from other adults and apart from a spouse, who would work outside of the home for most of the day. The sharing of communal living quarters also provided more opportunities for mothers to share their experiences of motherhood/womanhood and to informally reflect on the construction of these roles. The isolation of mothers in the traditional, nuclear family, in contrast, kept women from sharing their insights on what was “natural” and what was created by culture. More often than not isolated mothers would conclude that their own experiences must be natural --in the absence of a community for comparison.⁹⁶

FAMILY: PUBLIC OR PRIVATE?

While some Leftist groups in the 1960’s argued that children would grow up better adjusted in the face of group parenting, and that parents would be healthier citizens for the communal support they received, the unique benefits of the private sphere were never successfully obliterated. Political scientist Jean Bethke Elshtain makes a convincing argument that the private family has something to offer that other forms of “family” do not. The public sphere, she insists, cannot successfully recreate the benefits of a healthy close-knit family. Despite claims by alternative family groups to dismantle the patriarchal relations of the traditional nuclear family, Elshtain argues that children do not develop the same bonds of attachment in such settings and do not emerge with as much trust and emotional balance as children who have been

⁹⁶ Another Mother for Peace targeted rural mothers/women with their mailing campaigns, convinced that urban mothers/ women had plenty of opportunities to fight the war. Mothers outside cities were less likely to have support communities to oppose the war (Katz 2006).

loved uniquely by a single parent or two (326-353).⁹⁷ Elshtain also inserts evidence from studies of children placed in institutions or communities that tried to simulate familial relations among peers, by using terms like “brother” and “sister.” She concludes that children who emerge from such settings do not flourish in terms of independent thought and become overly reliant on authorities. Some of the alternative communities in the 1960s and ‘70s used these strategies –which are evident in *Vida* and *A Walking Fire*.⁹⁸

Elshtain argues convincingly that the structure and nature of the private family serves a purpose that the “public” life does not. Its small, intimate community, the intensity of its bonds, the selflessness that must emerge in healthy parenting, the lessons that children learn about attachment, trust, and interdependence, are vital to making them healthy human beings. Her analysis is not sentimental and she does not romanticize the nuclear or biological family. Rather she juxtaposes it to other forms of childrearing (accidental and intentional) that have been experimented with and finds that they fail to provide some basic skills that human beings need to function constructively in the world. She affirms that: ““The minimum guarantee for the evolution of the human bond is prolonged intimacy with a nurturing person or persons” (Fraiber qtd. in Elshtain 331).

I find Elshtain’s analysis useful because it helps me to evaluate the distinct quality of “private” with which family life (and by extension, motherhood) has long been associated. If mothers are to become political actors and to politicize private

⁹⁷ Elshtain uses the work of several social scientists to support this argument. See particularly chapter six of her work for more.

⁹⁸ Authoritarian regimes have also done this at the national level. Stalin in Russia and Ceausescu in Romania are two examples.

relations, does that mean that the entire notion of the private sphere should be erased? The answer is 'no' for several reasons. First, mothers would not have such powerful voices if their relationships with their children were ones that could be easily replicated in the public sphere. Elshtain contends that this is not possible. It is the very private nature of the parent-child bond that gives it such power when it is highlighted in the public sphere. Second, private, family life has an important role for children: connections with one or two constant adult relationship gives children security --developmentally, socially and emotionally—which ultimately make contributions to human existence. The tendency of second wave feminists in the U.S. to politicize all relations –even those inside the biological family — seems to leave little room for the private by “overpoliticizing our most intimate relations and turning the family into a war of all against all to be negotiating by contract” (Elshtain 337). In their zeal to allow women to speak in the public sphere, some elements of the second wave feminist trend discouraged private, family life and diminished its unique value, arguing that its benefits could be recreated outside the nuclear family. Elshtain disagrees, arguing that: “To call some abstract structure , or a loose collection of like-minded, unrelated peers ‘families’ is to treat our most basic human relationships as frivolously , as mere historic accidents, or as the excreta of oppressive relations having no deep inner logic, meaning or purpose of their own” (331).

The value of the private sphere as shown in Elshtain’s analysis conflicts with paradigms on the Left and the Right that would make private, family life subordinate to public life in literal or figurative ways. Some Left wing groups in the 1960s suggested the description of “private” was not accurate for the “family” as all of its

members were shaped by politics external to the family. As Shelley Wright argues, “the private sphere itself is a construction of modern political theory and is nowhere unregulated by state power” (67). Family members, despite enjoying a “private” sphere in the home, learned to embrace patriarchal values and to act in gendered roles that were heavily influenced by patriarchy and capitalism. In this view, ferreting out relations of oppression would require fundamental changes in familial relations not only at the level of gender roles but in any interactions of an exploitative nature: parent-child relations, the role of work in the maintenance of family, the roles of materialism and consumption in the family, and more.

The Left wing, however, went too far in its assertion that there was really no private life to speak of –that all was political. In *Vida* all of the thinking women in the text retreat into some form of private, family life after years in the Movement. They end up disillusioned with the exploitative nature of sexual relations and the dominance of activist men. The unspoken dynamic is that they are exhausted from the very absence of private life (and private relations) in the Movement. The Right Wing is also too extreme in its construction of private, family life in the service of public missions. In chapter three I discussed numerous twentieth century examples of this phenomenon including the creation of the Gold Star Mothers during WWI, the Women’s Section of the Navy League in WWII, and the manipulation of mothers’ roles during WWII --drawing them into factory work at the start of the war and shuttling them back home afterwards--- all in the name of proper nationalist motherhood. In the Vietnam era the Department of Defense’s blatant targeting of

mothers with propaganda productions –as in the 1965 Department of Defense film “Why Vietnam?”—is a more recent example.

If we see private life (and family life as a subset) as providing humans with qualities that public (political) life cannot accomplish, then we must acknowledge several important dynamics. First, the mother-child relationship has been unique in that it takes place largely in the private sphere, whereas traditional political life is largely public. Second, the bonds of the family are ones that are not easily ruptured, even by allegiance to the state, which cannot create the same affective attachments that the healthy family does. Thus, the state is to some degree reliant on the family – in particular, on the influence of the mother on the child -- to create citizens who are loyal to its aims and willing to sacrifice themselves. The mother, herself, may serve as an impediment to nationalist agendas if she is asked to put her child’s life at risk. Finally, both the Right and the Left disempower mothers when they posit the family in extreme ways in relation to the public/private. The Left’s claim that there should be no private sphere is untenable because it would deprive children (and adults) of some of the benefits of private, family life: a sphere in which care and intimacy trump competition and rivalry.⁹⁹ The Right’s transparent attempts to make the state into a kind of symbolic family, all working for the good of the whole are also dangerous. In this model mothers become bearers of the sacred duty of producing loyal citizens which perverts the private role of the mother: to preserve and protect her children – even if this means refusing to let them fight for the interests of the state.

⁹⁹ Values like nurturing and care are ones that second wave feminists touted as central to feminism and a notion of a women’s culture. Feminists have long debated whether these values can flourish within a dominant patriarchal society. This concern was one of the motives for all-female communes that sprung up in the 1960s. See Alice Echols’ *Daring to be Bad*.

As elaborated in my earlier chapters, Sara Ruddick describes the most basic, cross-cultural, maternal goals to be the “preservation, growth and social acceptability” of children (22). This last term cannot be completely private because it is certainly defined by public discourse and so informed by public, political power. In this way mothering is not a completely private practice. If service to one’s country or loyalty to a government is socially constructed then young men who refuse this --with maternal encouragement-- for example, may be socially isolated. This, in fact, happened to many Americans who refused to serve in Vietnam.¹⁰⁰ For those who were killed in Vietnam, like Peg Mullen’s son, Michael, they may have paid the ultimate price for the good mothering they received. Peg Mullen’s anguish captures this perspective in *Unfriendly Fire* with her explanation that, “We raised Mikey in the belief that an individual, a man, obeyed. That you didn’t question, and... now this was so wrong! So wrong! Mikey never went against an order. And this, this is our anguish! That we did such a thing to our child” (126).

CATHOLICISM AND NATIONALISM

My first chapter discusses the role of the Catholic Church in the Argentine construction of motherhood in great detail. Although the Catholic Church does not play as significant a role in U.S. culture, I will comment on its influence as it relates to the public/private distinction in the U.S. Although the origins of the Catholic Church in the U.S. are distinct from Latin America, they have traditionally shared a common hierarchical structure and a generally high regard for clergy as moral

¹⁰⁰ The example of the 1969 Evelyn Whitehorn lawsuit in Swerdlow is telling (174-175).

leaders.¹⁰¹ The extent to which Catholic clergy in the Americas involve themselves in public political affairs has been a subject of much contention over the centuries. The explicit involvement of many Latin American clergy in social justice reform following Vatican II lead to many breaks with the Church in the twentieth century, both voluntary and involuntary.¹⁰² Many of these ruptures can be seen as casualties of the public/private split, with activist clergy claiming that issues of poverty and human rights are “public” issues while the Church defined them as “private” matters to be handled by the state.¹⁰³ In the case of the Mullen family, their interactions with their parish priest following their son’s death illustrate a similar ambivalence in the American Catholic Church towards the blurring of the private/public divide.¹⁰⁴ As recounted for C.D. B. Bryan’s *Friendly Fire*, Gene Mullen explains that his parish priest would not speak publicly against the war, despite his personal misgivings about it.

[Priest]: “Peg knows that I’m against the war.... I have my own private feelings about it.”

“Only private feelings?” Gene asked.

[Priest]: “I’ve never taken a public stand on the war.”

¹⁰¹ The founding of Catholic parishes in the U.S. by Germans and Poles in the eighteenth century created a relatively more democratic character in the U.S. Catholic Church (Bianchi and Ruether).

¹⁰² Many clergy in Latin America, for example, devoted themselves to liberation theology beginning in the 1960s or broke with the Church completely to start their own initiatives for social justice. Some were excommunicated for their activities. See Berryman for more on this. It is believed that many of the clergy who were disappeared in Argentina were active in movements informed by the principles of liberation theology.

¹⁰³ Significantly, in this model the state is a kind of private “family” which subsequently should be protected from the intrusions of forces outside its sovereignty. Paradoxically, the Bishops at Puebla in 1979 “explicitly rejected the notion that faith should be restricted to personal or family life” (Berryman 128).

¹⁰⁴ A 1980 ban on Catholic clergy holding elective office is an example of this divide. In contrast, clergy in the Latin American Catholic Church have long held positions of political influence, although not formally sanctioned.

Gene: “Why not?”

“Because I don’t think it’s my place. I don’t make public statements,” Father Shimon said. “I have private feelings, my own, ah, personal feelings. I go to veteran’s hospitals. I say prayers. Peg knows how I feel.”

“Peg knows! Peg knows,” Gene said angrily. “But nobody else does. What kind of man of God are you? Why don’t you stand up like a man and speak out instead of whisper against the war!”

Father Shimon sat in embarrassed silence.

“Do you plan to take a public stand?” Gene asked him.

“No, Gene, I don’t think so...” (67-68).

Like so many of the *Madres* in Argentina, the Mullens were deeply injured by the priest’s refusal to publicly condemn the war. Peg Mullen reported that, “The problems with our priest had been endless since the day he came with the military official to tell us of Michael’s death” (Mullen 27). Mullen explains that the priest visited them only once during the nine days of waiting for Michael’s body to be returned from Vietnam, and refused several small requests surrounding Michael’s burial: “We felt the animosity was the result of [us] refusing a military funeral – Father was a twenty-year military retiree” (Mullen 22). Although the Mullens’ testimony does not pretend to make a larger statement about the Church’s attitudes towards the war, their interactions with this priest certainly highlight the public/private distinction. Was their loss a private one, which should be borne privately? Or was it a public one, the cost of which should be debated publicly?

Apparently for this clergy the role of the Church was not a public one. His attitude suggests that private grief should not inform political decisions, even when a loved one is cast in a public conflict. *A Walking Fire*, which I will examine below, also shows Catholicism to be a patriarchal force, allied with nationalist policy. It controls women's behavior by restricting female sexuality and shaming women who live outside of nuclear family structures.

Vida

Marge Piercy's 1979 novel *Vida* documents the lives of several women involved in the political underground movement in the 1960s and 1970s. It shows how motherhood and alternatives to the nuclear family become sites of opposition to the nation and thus, the War. It also demonstrates how alternative family structures failed to provide the stability of the traditional nuclear family and how patriarchy continued to thrive even in Leftist communities. For these reasons, many of the women in the story turn to exclusively female protest groups to oppose the war and most of them turn back to the model of the nuclear family. I chose this novel because it provides a perspective on how political motherhood developed as an identity in the U.S. in the 1960s. Groups of women banded together to affirm an unusual combination of political stances: their authority as mothers; their opposition to the state's war in Vietnam; and their support for the private nuclear family—despite its patriarchal structure-- as a space of strength for women/mothers.

In many ways, *Vida* along with *A Walking Fire* suggest that the combination of second wave feminisms and patriarchal oppression created social, political and

economic conditions that favored the formation of groups like Another Mother for Peace in the U.S. Although the account is fictionalized, the activities of Vida's group (the main character's name as well as the title) closely resemble several 1960s and 70s groups that used violence (bank robberies, bombings, and sabotage) to promote social change. The Weathermen and the Black Panthers were among others who sought to destabilize the U.S. government and supplant capitalism with some form of socialism. Some members of each of these groups were prosecuted for their crimes and served prison terms in the 1970s and beyond. In addition to violent groups, the Movement was composed of various groups that eschewed violence such as Students for a Democratic Society and Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Piercy's novel uses the term "the Movement" to refer to all of these groups so I will follow that pattern in my analysis.

The alternative family structures with which the Movement experiments in *Vida* serve as a juxtaposition to the traditional nuclear family which is critiqued as bourgeois and materialistic. The Movement believes that the very private nature of the traditional nuclear family makes it more susceptible to relations of inequality and patterns of consumption. So it develops communal living arrangements in which relationships are much more public and groups of people can together produce what they need to survive, rather than depending on outside sources which also makes them complicit in the politics that support production and distribution. One of the most striking developments in this story is that, from the perspective of the women/mothers, the experiment fails. The very absence of a family-based private sphere --and the safety and support that this entails-- leave the women feeling

vulnerable and exhausted. By the end of the story all of the women have taken steps to re-establish a private family sphere in their lives. Vida seeks out her biological family, explaining that “I want my family.... I want my life back” (378). Belinda has her own children in opposition to the Movement leaders and Alice leaves the Movement because it will not allow her to have children. Natalie, the only married mother in the group is so frustrated with the intrusion of the public on her marriage and mothering that she starts her own women’s/mothers’ group. She rebels at the notion that even motherhood should be viewed through purely public, political lenses, gesturing towards a private sphere that is based on non-political motives. The only other woman who remains in the Movement and makes motherhood a secondary role pays the ultimate price. Belinda is killed in a bombing attack, for which she volunteered, leaving behind her young child.

For my examination of political motherhood, these trends in Piercy’s text suggest three positions that I will argue throughout the rest of my texts: First, Elshtain’s analysis of the importance of the private sphere for emotional and psychological health of children and adults is accurate. There is something about motherhood that is necessarily private and attempts to make it a purely political identity –in the service of the state, for example-- pervert the core of familial relations. Second, the nuclear family in the U.S. has been set up to absorb the challenges to patriarchy that political motherhood would inspire towards the state. Male heads of nuclear families are easily drawn into viewing allegiance to the state as allegiance to the family. It benefits the state if such males see female challenges to the state as a threat to their own masculinity because they will, then, try to discourage

such challenges. Finally, although historically based in the nuclear family, patriarchy can flourish in intimate relationships outside of this structure. Merely making relationships “public” does not solve the problem of patriarchal dominance.

To explore how “patriarchy” impacts political mothers in *Vida* we must define the term and place it in its historical context. For my purposes I will use Shelia Ruth’s concept of patriarchy as a society in which masculinist ideals and practices are promoted above all others (Ruth 45-47). Masculinist values in the U.S. include aggressivity, courage, sexual potency, and dominance over women. Patriarchy also privileges reason over emotion, independence over interdependence, dominance over cooperation. The phenomena manifests itself in several ways in *Vida*, creating conditions in which women are second class citizens within the anti-war movement and political motherhood becomes a flashpoint for various unresolved issues within the community.

The first symptom of patriarchy in the novel is violence against women – both discursive and physical. Many of the women report being raped by men in the Movement. Significantly, some of the women don’t see it as rape in the beginning. Only in consciousness raising sessions, a popular practice among second wave feminist, do they come to see unwanted sex or forcible sex, even with committed partners, as rape.

Violence against Vietnamese women is another patriarchal practice that the U.S. female activists must confront. In one scene *Vida* listens as a lover of hers, an ex- U.S. soldier now in the Movement, tells of how he victimized a Vietnamese woman: ““The sarge said, Go on, stick your bayonet up in her... They cut off her

nipples, her back was broken [I took] my pistol and shot her in the head.... The kindest thing I could think of...” (126). Although she sympathizes with this ex-soldier who has come over to the anti-war movement, Vida can’t help identifying with the mutilated Vietnamese woman. Vida’s sister, Natalie, identifies with Vietnamese women on another level. Pregnant during a violent anti-war demonstration, she balks at being confined to desk by her fellow activists, yelling that: ““They don’t ask Vietnamese women if they’re pregnant before they drop napalm on them!””(127). Piercy appears to have intentionally juxtaposed the American women’s allegiance to their compatriots with their transnational identifications with other females. Doing so highlights the multiple subjectivities that the politicized mother occupied in the Vietnam era.

The existence of violence against women within the Movement and restrictions on pregnant women created an environment in which women were not completely free to act as independent political subjects. In this way *Vida* shows several ways in which women/mothers lose power when private life was turned into public territory. First, when sexuality became public women have less control over it. Second, when women/mothers attempt to act as political subjects they have to compete directly with male activists who tend to dominate them. In *Vida*, mothers/women lose out in the Anti-Vietnam movement because they are shuttled into the domestic world and childrearing while men are advanced to positions of authority. These trends are corroborated in written testimonials and in my own interviews with several members of the real Movement.

When sexual relations became relatively public in the counterculture of the 1960s and '70s, women lost some of the control they had previously enjoyed in the private sphere. Something that was once very private –sexual intimacy—became a more public, almost political exchange tied to the power dynamics of the group.¹⁰⁵ Many women in *Vida* described being passed around as booty to new male activists or draft resisters. The real life draft-resistance poster which featured Joan Baez posed seductively with two other attractive young women was captioned with the popular slogan: “Girls Say ‘Yes’ to Guys who Say ‘No’” (Baez 255). The idea that sexual access to women was a reward for men who refused the draft is an example of this phenomenon.

The de-privatization of sexuality had special implications for mothers in *Vida*. *Vida*, herself, comments that the hostility of the group towards its only mother, Natalie, can be explained by her status as a married woman: she was not like the rest of the group who were “available to each other as sex objects” (119). Such valuation of women in terms of their public, sexual availability speaks to the misogyny still present in the Movement, despite its claims to progressive attitudes.¹⁰⁶ This is well documented in histories of the break of the women’s movement from the mainstream anti-Vietnam war movement. *Vida* goes one step further to speculate that the birth of the mother-based group was partially a consequence of this tension over sexuality. Once Natalie is married and becomes a mother her attitudes towards sexuality change

¹⁰⁵ In several histories of the time women describe being exploited by male members who continued to dominate the internal politics of the Movement. Some white women in the civil rights movement claimed that they felt they had to prove their devotion to the movement by sleeping with black male activists (Echols 30).

¹⁰⁶ The Movement in *Vida*, for example, took pride in rescuing women from domestic violence and harboring them and their children in safe houses but maintained certain chauvinistic practices within their own communities.

since she has committed—at least in theory—to a single sexual partner. Slowly she begins to identify less and less with younger women who could not comprehend the changes that marriage and motherhood had wrought in her priorities. One scene in *Vida* captures this distinction well with Natalie pushing “a stroller over to the benches where the mothers who weren’t stoned were collected, watching the action near the SAW [Students Against the War] booths and talking together. Vida felt a pang of dismay for Natalie’s being stuck there on the fringes” (Piercy 107).¹⁰⁷ The mothers are still active, public subjects but they are still marginalized. In another scene Natalie is marginalized from a political action by her husband who yells that, “Your duty is to your unborn child. You’re staying!” to which Natalie replies: “What kind of fink do you think I am to sit home when everybody is putting their bodies on the line? Do you think I have some kind of pass out of having to take chances because I’m a mother?” (127). When she is finally assigned to phone bank duty so that she has some involvement she is bitter that, “You’re just trying to make me feel as if I’m still a political person,” said Natalie, close to tears” (127).

The construction of motherhood as a private role, and one that is incompatible with public, political action is the result of two patriarchal tendencies: the split between the private and the public and the construction of women as poorly equipped for public politics. Women’s construction as subjects ruled by emotion (not reason), biologically linked to children, and “naturally” oriented towards relationships, makes them subjects who are better suited—in patriarchal perspectives—to the domestic sphere. The belief within the Movement, despite its progressive

¹⁰⁷ This description parallels descriptions by Gerta Katz, one of the founding mothers of AMP. In my interviews with her she described AMP’s membership as much more conservative than, for example, Women Strike for Peace, who tended to be younger, more urban and more sexually liberal.

rhetoric, that women were essentially self-sacrificing, nurturing, emotional and domestic is present throughout *Vida*. In one scene *Vida* describes how her transformation to a married woman abruptly changed the group's vision of her: "all the men suddenly feeling they could use me as instant mother. Sympathy, meals, endless support, and if I asked anything back they'd say, But you're a married woman. I was supposed to be a public resource for everybody else" (184).

The persistence of such essentialist visions of women is striking within a movement that so earnestly sought, at least intellectually, to weed out oppression. Given these circumstances, the growth of AMP in the novel appears to be a reaction to traditionally essentializing trends in the mainstream anti-Vietnam groups. The real AMP was pointedly not feminist in name, as I explored in chapter three. However, multiple testimonies of women who joined female-based anti-war groups, which frequently used maternalist rhetoric, express their frustration at being shuttled into tasks that were boring and non-creative. While women typed up notes, made coffee and took phone calls, men drafted policy papers and spoke in public.

The notion that motherhood was a choice that had a negative impact on the activism of the Movement, is a central one in *Vida*. Motherhood is depicted as self-centered and associated with materialism and traditional gender roles. In the beginning *Vida*, herself, condemns her sister, Natalie, for having kids: "Look at your life. Husband, babies, toys, dinners. Are you so far beyond Ruby and Sandy [their parents]? We can't make a new society in the shell of the old one if we are living a middle class existence" (181). The idea that mothers could, themselves, be political actors –and that motherhood could be a site of political action—was beyond

the Movement's "revolutionary" vision. And so mothers were punished in direct and indirect ways.

At one point in *Vida* several of the Movement's members in Vida's underground group have grown frustrated with the limited availability of Natalie, the only mother in their group. Because of child care responsibilities, Natalie has begun to feel alienated from the planning of projects and to sense the hostility that the male members emit. Tensions come to a boil when male members of the group suggest that Natalie be kicked off of the Steering Committee because she has trouble getting to all of the meetings due to domestic and child care responsibilities: "Damn it, she can't sit on the steering Committee if she can't come to meetings' Oscar said sternly. 'This isn't an optional activity if you happen to have time off from waxing your floor'" (118). Oscar's reaction captures the attitude of many men in the Movement that motherhood is a luxury and even a bourgeois decision, as emphasized by his focus on the material aspects of a home. When it is suggested that Natalie be allowed to bring her children to the meeting, it is met with a disdain, "I'd sooner let her bring a dog. Ten dogs,' Bob Rossi said." When Natalie's sister, Vida, defends her with "What do you expect her to do?" Rossi coldly replies, "Maybe she could give [her child] away" (118). Clearly child rearing is a female activity, the details of which do not interest male members. But it is not just the male membership who complains of Natalie's unavailability. It is a female member, who is allied with the old patriarchal guard that Oscar represents, who chimes in with, "Yeah, Natalie ought to join Another Mother for Peace,' Jan said sarcastically" (119).

This dialogue captures a number of themes that arose in AMP's discourse and exposes the many struggles around changing gender roles, class and political participation. First, motherhood is constructed, in this far Left wing group, as a luxury that has a price attached to it –the exclusion of mothers from politics. Women have to work their motherhood around politics, not the other way around, as one female member suggests, with her idea of bringing children to the meeting: “I think we should start [children] young,” Lohania said softly (118). In this view child-raising is part of the ideological mission of the group, not an extraneous diversion. To the patriarchs it is something that can be dismissed easily with flippant remarks. Motherhood within this political group has clearly become a site where frustrated activists can easily vent their anger.

In another scene one activist mother is forced to decide between staying with her young child or joining a Movement mission that would keep her on the road for months while her group conducted robberies and other “guerrilla action.” The mother, Belinda, is forced into this decision on a moment's notice by male members of the group who have split over internal divisions. When the women in the group protest, the argument exposes the conflicts over child-rearing and political action that have simmered beneath the surface of the Movement, stigmatizing mothers as ineffective political agents:

“I won't let you take the baby!’ Marti said, arms folded on her ample bosom. ‘You've all gone crazy.’”

“Leave [the baby], Kevin ordered. We’ll have to travel light till we knock over a couple of banks. We’ll come back for her by summer.”

“I can’t leave her,’ Belinda wailed. ‘I can’t!’”

“You can’t take a baby along, ‘ Kevin said. ‘Come or stay, but you can’t do the kind of fighting we have up the road with a kid on your back.”

“She’s just a baby, Belinda,’ Marti said stubbornly. ‘She’ll get sick. She’ll be scared. She’ll miss me. She’ll miss the other kids.’”

Jimmy stepped past her and took a hold of Belinda, still fingering her coat, crouched over. ‘Come on [Belinda], let’s get moving. We’ll show all these jerks what guerilla action is....”

“Belinda let herself be tugged along. ‘I’m coming back in the summer!’ she called over her shoulder to Marti. ‘Take care of [the baby she’s leaving]. I’m coming back for her by summer!’”

By summer only Bill had returned and Jimmy and Belinda were dead” (315-316).

The dialogue exposes the way in which child-rearing is constructed by the males in the group as a practical impediment to political action. Since Movement members gained internal stature and power through participation in such “guerilla actions” mothers were at a distinct disadvantage within this paradigm. Belinda would be sacrificing her chance for advancement within the group by staying to care for her baby. The way in which the males in the group rush her to a hasty decision dismisses its importance. Belinda does not even get to say good-bye to her baby who, it is

tacitly assumed, will be cared for by the other women/mothers of the group.

Belinda's death in one of the group's subsequent robberies is a brutal commentary on the price her child pays for her hasty deferral to patriarchal pressures. Despite their claims to make all relations public (read: political), the group's patriarchy continues to regard motherhood as a private, non-political position. In this way mothers lose their status as political subjects and the power to influence political decisions.

Hostility towards motherhood—an impediment to revolutionary political action—is evident in the novel from male attitudes towards pregnancy. Much like sexuality, pregnancy is viewed as a decision open to public debate and discussion by the group. When one of the fugitive leaders, Lark, first hears of another member's pregnancy he responds without emotion, ““Why hasn't [the pregnancy] been taken care of? Has no one volunteered to go with her to arrange it?” (294). Alice is later told that she cannot bear the child because: “We agreed last year that fugitives have no right to bear children. Nothing has changed.... Do you think that a woman who may go to prison at any moment has the right to bear a child?” (295). The rule is explained with reference to Belinda, a member who “insisted on giving birth against all arguments....and ...precipitated the Board ruling that no fugitives could bear children” (293). The rule is an example of how women lose power when private decisions become public ones in patriarchal contexts. Male control over female reproduction is another sign of the way in which women/mothers lose when all aspects of life become “public.”

But the desire for family life and procreation persist in some members. In a later scene Alice decides to turn herself in and accept jail time so that she can have a

baby. She must now pay a heavy public price, for a private decision –motherhood. The group calls her a traitor and they fear that she will abandon her political convictions and rat out other members still in hiding. Vida is incredulous that she would “turn herself in just to have a baby.” (378) But another female member, Eva, defends Alice with “it’s not a *just*. Don’t you ever want to have a baby? ... I think she had a right to take her chances” (378). The split between the women suggests that the anti-family, anti-motherhood sentiment of the Movement may be wearing thin. As the fugitives get older, and spend more time underground, moving between hiding places among strangers, their desire for permanency grows. For Alice this means turning her back on the Movement and in its stance against childbearing.

In contrast to Alice, a fugitive male member, Roger, is allowed to take up with a woman who already has children from a previous marriage. But he is penalized within the Movement for this disloyal decision. Sizing him up for a risky mission, Vida concludes that “An action is the last think in the world he’ll want. He’s got instant family”(352). Since the Movement sees family life as incompatible with political action, Roger has to show his willingness to abandon his new family in order to salvage his political identity. Joel explains this to Vida as they discuss whom to select for the next guerilla action: “[Roger] has to prove himself. To show he can have family and still be just as revolutionary.... He’ll be for anything chancy” (352).

The control that the Movement exerts over its members’ decisions to reproduce falls especially hard on its female members. Some women are forced into abortions or by-pass child-rearing entirely to maintain their political positions. Parenthood –especially motherhood—is seen as incompatible with the political

priorities of the Movement. It is impractical because mothers, like Natalie, will tend to put their children's needs before those of the group. It is also seen as a betrayal of the Movement's ideology, which rejects the nuclear family as a tool of the oppressive, capitalist state. And so the women in the story have very little private space in which to make decisions about sexuality and childbirth. Instead they have to choose from several alternatives: defect to become mothers (Alice), disobey the ban on motherhood but rank their children as secondary (Belinda) or leave the Movement and join Another Mother for Peace (Natalie). In the end all of them are punished for their decisions: Alice is ostracized from the Movement forever, Belinda is killed in a political action and leaves a motherless child, and Natalie turns her work exclusively women's issues.

The vision of groups like the one in *Vida* and the real life Movement was particularly limited when it came to relationships within the family and how the family would relate to the state. While the patriarchal model has the nuclear family producing subjects who are loyal to the state, Left wing groups were ambivalent about the power relations of the traditional nuclear family and certainly did not want their own children to be loyal to the state in its capitalist form. But they had not worked out a system that would replace the traditional model of the nuclear family nor had they established a revolutionary state. This left them in limbo on two crucial levels.

While they experimented with alternative family structures they actively undermined their nation state. As a result they staggered unpredictably from the emotional and political wreckage of these encounters. Sexual encounters in *Vida* are

multiple, brief and uncommitted. But the emotions they stir up impact the group's ability to engage in consistent political action. They create alliances and resentments that the group doesn't want to acknowledge because they believe sex should be free of such emotional baggage, arguably a patriarchal conception of sexuality.

The group's relation to the state is equally problematic. On the political scene some are in jail for serious crimes, others are forced to live underground, severing ties with loved ones for their own legal safety. The fragmented nature of life underground makes it difficult for any of the characters to establish any long-term bonds akin to what we might term "family," biological or otherwise. Similarly, their transient conditions make any serious attempt at a new state model realistically limited. The real absence of a feasible, alternative model of family or state is revealed in the group's hostility towards motherhood, the decision of many female members to split into women's groups, and the resurrection of the essentialist question by many women in the group.

These dynamics are important because they may partially explain the creation of a mothers' group against Vietnam in an era rife with anti-war groups. *Vida* reveals, in more personal terms the struggles that the generation of AMP'ers experienced in defining gender roles, motherhood, the nuclear family, and the state. *Vida* helps us to see that Another Mother for Peace embodied many of the questions that the wider U.S. counterculture was asking about the public and the private, the family and the state.

The relation of these themes to sexuality and emotion should not be underestimated. In *Vida* it is the women who first begin to see that too much sexual

freedom and the absence of long term, stable partnerships does not create enough stability to build a society. We can see this in Vida's desire to return to her own biological family in the end, as well as the group's shock and disappointment that Natalie's marriage breaks up. It is the women who come to this knowledge through their emotions, an epistemological grounding upon which the real AMP relied.¹⁰⁸ Significantly, women's essentialization as emotional beings is chided by many men in the story, as by male commentators on the real AMP. But in the end it is this orientation that leads the women to a new knowledge about how to construct the social order that all of them desire. In *Vida* this order cannot be based on uncontrolled partnerings among members. Ultimately it is the experience or prospect of mothering that reveals this. Alice turns herself in and serves a jail sentence so that she can have children before she is too old. Vida, herself, risks her own safety to see her own mother before she dies. Her return to her own biological family makes her wonder that she ever was innocent enough to believe she could "create" family upon ideological grounds: "Brothers and sisters, lord. We did call each other that" (179).¹⁰⁹ Natalie becomes a leader of a women's group that focuses specifically issues of gender – violence against women, childcare, job training. Her experiences as a marginalized mother in the Movement have shifted her focus: she continues to be a political activist but with a concentration on gender. In the end her "private" life was not embraced by the group, ostensibly devoted to the merging of the private and the public. It was her motherhood that kept her apart, and ultimately showed her that the

¹⁰⁸ Much of AMP's discourse is based on emotion, as discussed in chapter three.

¹⁰⁹ Vida also reveals her distrust of Movement members when it comes to authentic emotion: "The only people with whom she ever let out her real feelings were her real family when she saw them.... The Network was artificial family. You could let out feelings, yes, but you were stuck with each other until death or disaster parted you" (66).

equality that the Movement touted did not extend to all relationships. Motherhood became a stumbling block for the Movement because it embodied many of the issues that it had not resolved: the persistence of patriarchy (dominance, violence, control over sexuality and reproduction) in communities supposedly dedicated to equality; the role of the nuclear family (if any) in this new society, and the relationship of the family to the state.

In the end it is the only mother in the group, Natalie, who sees most clearly the costs of the patriarchy to which the female activists in *Vida* submit. As Natalie explains to Vida why she started working with a women-only group, “They don’t punish me for having kids. They don’t stare at my breasts when I talk. They don’t come on to me and then walk off when they notice the ring on my hand and find out I have two children. When I express my feelings, they don’t call me hysterical”(203).

My own interviews with AMP founder Gerta Katz and analysis of AMP rhetoric confirm that many real AMP members were aware of the dynamics that trouble Natalie’s character in *Vida*. Apparently art imitates life as the author of *Vida*, Marge Piercy, is mentioned several times in Alice Echols’ well-known 1989 history of second wave feminism, *Daring to be Bad*. One has to wonder if the author was sketching a portrait of the birth of Another Mother for Peace in her depictions of Natalie.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Marge Piercy became a well-known writer in her era, authoring several critically acclaimed texts that included questions of gender, politics, and violence. Among her many novels with these themes are *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), *Gone to Soldiers* (1987), and *Fly Away Home* (1984).

A Walking Fire

In several Vietnam-era texts there is a sense that women abandon the state only after their family bonds have been violated. They break with the state because it becomes clear to them that the *state* does not really believe in the public/private divide that it encourages in its citizens. This break occurs in Valerie Miner's 1995 novel *A Walking Fire* in which the main character, Cora, protests the Vietnam War after her two brothers are sent to fight. In her protest it becomes clear that private family relationships have been heavily influenced by public forces, particularly those of nationalism and patriotism. Cora discovers her greatest challenge to reside within the family itself, whose subjectivities have been constructed by the state's interests, which link masculinity to military service. Although Cora is not their mother, she is a mother figure to her two brothers and father, after her mother's suicide in Cora's childhood. When she goes to college and begins working against the war in Vietnam, her father and brothers see it as a betrayal. Cora sees it just the opposite—that she is trying to save their lives. But in doing so, she has to break with the state, whose policies she cannot abide. She does so in a very literal way, fleeing to Canada after burning down a draft-registration center. She lives as a fugitive in Canada, estranged from her family, for twenty years until her father's illness brings her back to the U.S.

The story is told in flashbacks to the 1960s in which the hostility of her brothers and father (who is also a veteran) is biting. They follow typical patriarchal strategies by trying to shame Cora back into obedience on several levels, all of which have roots in patriarchal constructions of proper womanhood. In the novel the men

hint that Cora's mother would be disappointed in her, calling into question her proper gender performance, and manipulating her with the specter of her lost mother. They also use her sexual activity against her, suggesting that she is disgracing the family. Finally, they call upon the patriarchal authority of the Catholic Church, the nation and the family to bring her back into the fold, threatening her membership in these communities. A single letter from her brother, George, fighting in Vietnam, captures all of these approaches:

Dear Cora: I hear you are making a ripe fool of yourself at that college. Burning flags and cheering Mao. Also hear you've become an advocate of free love. How do you think Mom would have felt? And Pop? Listen, I'll give you a chance. I won't tell him a thing if you write and promise me you're going to start behaving like a Catholic girl, an American again (34).

Cora is conscious of how her brother controls the language with which these subjects are discussed, another patriarchal advantage. She sees how his location within the binaries created by patriarchal paradigms limits his thinking, but also her ability to suggest other ways of thinking. "Of course it had been impossible to respond to George. For him it was black and white. He was being loyal to his country, his family. And in disagreeing, she was a traitor. Ron took the same view" (34). In this patriarchal view women who are disloyal to the state are also disloyal to the family. This has serious consequences for Cora since her father is also a veteran and "nothing meant as much to Pop as family loyalty" (24). Her private relationships are threatened by her public protests. When she raises the possibility of disagreeing

with the state -- “what if we pulled out [of Vietnam]?”-- she is reprimanded severely by her father:

“No place for treason at my table, understand? This is a patriotic home. I’m proud of my contribution transporting ammunition. Proud of George. I’ll be proud of Ron when he’s old enough to get involved” (25-26).

The patriarchal attitudes of Cora’s brother and father are evident not only in their approach to the War but also in their treatment of the women in their family. Until Cora’s rebellion, the women are silenced, domesticated and obedient. Aunt Min fits herself submissively into the patriarchal model, even at great sacrifice to her own life: “Pop never respected his younger sister, always treated her as a servant, even when she flew to his house after his wife left ...and raised his children. Here she was at sixty still looking after the bastard and arranging for Cora to fill in. That’s what women did all over the world, trained younger women to fill in” (13).

Cora’s mother is a vague figure in the background, committed to an institution for undisclosed reasons where she killed herself. But she was a thinking woman, intellectually curious, in whose footsteps Cora seems to have followed:

Mom read the dictionary for fun....’You learn that there’s so much you don’t know.’ Cora had overheard Mom explaining to Aunt Min.

Cora had been next door in the kitchen, but she pictured Aunt Min’s face, her curly head shaking as she parried fondly, ’And there’s so much you don’t need to know’ (118).

Aunt Min's reaction reflects her own patriarchal construction as a timid woman who lived to serve her family in a domestic role. It contrasts with Cora's attitudes towards education, which she had to fight to achieve, winning a scholarship that allowed her to attend college. She knows that embracing education signaled a distinct approach to life –one that questioned patriarchal paradigms: “she knew going to college had meant saving her life at some profound expense” (39).

To her father and brothers, her college education has been a source of corruption. It has made her into a political subject, a sexual being, and has threatened her willingness to fulfill proper gender roles. In one scene as she cooks dinner for the family while on her college break, her father reinforces this with: “Glad to see you haven't lost all your female instincts in those libraries” (24). But in another scene her father is hostile to her education: “I'm telling you one more time, you drop this crazy radical business and this is your home again. This is a loyal American family with two boys risking their lives in the service; you should be ashamed of yourself... I should never have let you go to that Commie college where you got sucked into that pinko style” (164). Cora's circulation in the public sphere of the university is seen as a threat to her private identity as a domestic woman.

Even though Cora recognizes the patriarchal dynamics that crippled her mother and aunt, and she rebels against women's construction as private subjects, she finds herself at times hobbled by them as well. Despite her strong opinions, in college debates about the war, she lacks the confidence to jump into the fray: “The men argued late into the night. Cora sat quietly and listened. There were many reasonable, conflicting points and lots of rhetoric. She had never learned to debate; she had never

learned to interrupt” (38). The construction of proper femininity as polite and non-aggressive is a theme that Another Mother for Peace stresses in their self-portraits. Activist women do not have to be rude, aggressive, or manly –all qualities that were stigmatized in females of the era.¹¹¹ Even AMP’s motto has a disembodied quality to it, “War is not healthy for children and other living things. “ Although the mothers are the presumed speakers here they are invisible in the phrase itself. There is no mandate or confrontation to the statement.

In other key moments in the novel Cora fights against the legacy of feminine silence in her family. When she finds herself backing down after trying to convince Ron not to enlist in the Vietnam War, she stops herself: “Instinctively Cora backed down. ‘I didn’t mean to upset you. I only meant....’ No, she would not fade into the wallpaper like Mom. ‘I only meant to save your life.’ She got up to clear the table” (30).

Although Cora is not the mother in this family, she has been the primary maternal force since her mother’s death and Aunt Min’s own marriage. Her devotion to her brothers’ safety has a distinctly maternal quality to it as she agonizes over her inability to protect them from the War. She dreams frequently of her brothers in Vietnam, wondering if her activism can help him: “George crouched in high grass. Helmet on his sweat ... How were they going to get him? ... What could she do to save him?” (24). One brother also dreams of Cora, claiming that her protests are actually harming them:

¹¹¹ Feminists in many eras have struggled with the question of whether women should work harder to “learn” masculine culture or whether characteristics of “female” culture should be encouraged in patriarchal environments.

“ One night I dreamt that my unit was crouching in an abandoned temple as you walked in carrying a grenade, looked all around until you spotted me and then lobbed it straight in my direction” (37). The presence of dreams –a kind of supernatural connection—implies a profound link, much like the mother-child bond. The concern of a mother for her child’s safety transcends space and time. In the rhetoric of groups like AMP and the *Madres*, this bond helps to authorize mothers’ public protest.

Despite their bravado in public, male gender roles are also profoundly disrupted in the novel. Their construction on the backs of patriarchal paradigms of national service and honor are clearly linked to males’ notions of themselves as masculine subjects. The younger son, facing the legacy of his father and older brother’s heroic military service, feels that he has little choice but to enlist and go to Vietnam.

““You have to serve your country...Responsible. Yes, that’s the word I’d use to describe standing alongside Pop and George. Loyal. Responsible”” (29). Here Ron conflates family and national allegiance, a pattern that the state facilitates in its patriarchal construction of public military service and private family relations. Ron’s comments suggest that he accepts his roles without an awareness of how they have been shaped for him. As feminist critic Diane Elam puts it, “ there is a similarity between being objectified and assuming a subject position already determined: subject positions are occupied by objects” (29).

In private conversations with Cora, however, Ron shows some independent subjectivity, admitting that, “ Sure, I’m afraid of the war. God knows what I’ll end up

doing. But it's more than that, I'd feel, I don't know, disloyal if I didn't go" (29). In the end Ron does go to Vietnam and spends years recovering from the emotional fallout.

Another patriarchal paradigm that affects mothers as political actors is the construction of women as overly emotional, and in some instances mentally unbalanced. In Miner's work, Cora's mother's depression and suicide loom large over Cora's own perceptions of the world. She is constantly assessing herself for signs of disconnect with "reality." This dynamic is challenged when she is forced to take a stand that is based primarily on emotion. Her love for her brothers moves her to try save them from the War and their opposition to her requires her to justify herself. Much like the Madres and AMP, Cora has to defend her position on grounds that are epistemologically different from their own. While reason guides the patriarchal perspectives of her father and brothers, Cora relies on emotion, which is dangerously associated with hysteria in women. Given her mother's history, "Cora was more afraid of craziness than anything" (27).

As a child her brother, George often called her "nuts" when she expressed anxiety about real situations.

When she awoke from a bad dream screaming, he sometimes comforted his silly, nutty sister. He let her crawl into his bed for the rest of the night. Nuts. She was nuts to worry about Father Manley's threats of damnation. She was nuts to pay attention when Pop was drunk. Nuts to tattle when George skipped school. Nuts to worry when Mom went to the hospital."

‘You’re acting like a freak, ‘he laughed. (104)

It is George who writes to Pop that Cora’s political actions can be traced to instability: “I’m sorry to inform you, Pop, that your daughter has fallen in with the lunatic fringe...’ There he was again, accusing her of being mad” (65-66). This characterization haunts Cora throughout her political activism, even as she takes her most serious political steps. As she’s lighting the fires at the draft center she thinks about “that silly column in *The Oregonian* claiming that the people who used violent tactics were psychological cripples or loonies preparing for the Apocalypse” (68).

In certain moments Cora questions the beliefs that had brought her to this place, so distant from her family’s convictions. She wonders if her perceptions about the state/family and the public/private could be askew: “Had she deserted Pop, George and Ron by protesting the war? By going to college? Was she playing an elaborate charade? What was the line between treason and lunacy? ... She would end up like Mom if she persisted in this fuzzy thinking” (32). Cora’s reliance upon emotion to guide her actions has allowed her to take a stand against her family. But in this passage she doubts her intuition, measuring it by patriarchal standards that would deem it “fuzzy thinking.” She lists several behaviors that have been historically discouraged in women – higher education, public protest and emotionality (hysteria)—and wonders if some of them have led her astray. The list is, by no coincidence, almost identical to gender behaviors stigmatized by the patriarchal, military state. The advantage here is that Cora believes that she is betraying the nuclear family, which has a more powerful hold on her allegiance.

Despite her family's adherence to patriarchal constructions of women (emotional, submissive, domestic, asexual), Cora tries out lifestyles that contradict these. She goes to college, becomes sexually active, becomes a political activist, and challenges the patriarchal system. Throughout this process Cora is a very self-aware subject, always questioning whether she is acting out of rebellion or integrity. She is painfully aware that although she does not see her actions as threatening family ties, her family does. Ultimately she must ask herself if she is willing to abandon her biological family for her political and personal stances. Although she does this in college, her flight to Canada is largely to avoid prosecution for arson. While it is not clear how her family relationships would have developed if she had remained in the U.S. they seemed to be deteriorating as she moved away from her father and brothers' political positions.

Throughout college and while in Canada, the topic of family never leaves Cora's mind for long. After all she sees her actions as a sacrifice for her brothers' lives, and is pained that they can't see it the same way:

Ron had dismissed her arguments about the war. She believed she had failed completely, for what use were marches and articles and impassioned letters to the editor if you couldn't convince your own brother, if you couldn't save your own family. Lenny had told her to relax, that they were all brothers and sisters in the movement, that they were breaking down the nuclear family. Just because Ron was too thick to listen to her didn't mean she couldn't save her other brothers. She tried hard to think of these guys as her brothers. (31)

Although she tries to recreate family in the Movement activists, she is humbled to see that her biological family continues to have a pull that is deeper than her public politics: “Your friends are the muscles –supporting you through crises— but your family is the bones, the skeleton, framing all possibilities” (64). The nation state appears very aware of this reality in its use of familial rhetoric to maintain the allegiance of its citizens.

In a profound irony, it is Cora who finally returns to the U.S. to care for her ailing father. Despite their history her family is still her primary motivation. Although her brothers live near their father, Pop has called for his daughter because his sons are trying to sell his house out from under him and put him in a nursing home. She is the only one who will respect the emotion that moves this retired sailor to want to stay in his home by the sea. In a double irony Cora’s brother, George, wants the house profits to cover some debts he incurred running guns to Central America --supporting a Right wing group called Americans for Freedom in Nicaragua. He seems to have gone to the extreme in choosing the state over the family but fails to recognize the paradox inherent in opposing his father.

In the end it is Cora who defends her weakened father and exposes her brother’s dishonesty. But after their father’s death, George turns on her and reports her to U.S. police where she is booked on twenty-year-old-arson charge. The familiar trope of women’s disloyalty to the state is resurrected when the jail guard who books Cora insults her with: “Traitor bitch.... I hate your kind for turning against our soldiers in Vietnam” (250). She is eventually released for lack of evidence and

returns to Canada while George is prosecuted for having stolen donations intended for the Nicaraguan group. Patriarchy crumbles in its own greed and self-seeking but Cora still shows maternal compassion for her father and brothers, whom she now sees as products of the systems that raised them. Cora's compassion is the triumph of the book.

Miner ends the book with the indignation of timid, domestic Aunt Min who laments: "How could [George] do this to his sister –turn her into the police? Send her to *jail*?It's a terrible thing –treachery in a family.... But you don't turn your sister in for political reasons" (251). On one level her observations capture the eternal struggle between maternal ties and patriarchal politics, with women privileging family bonds in the end. But it also highlights Aunt Min's naiveté in thinking that the nuclear family is a private harbor from some external force called politics. Aunt Min fails to see that individuals within the family, as well as the family itself, are powerfully shaped by national and cultural models of proper gender performance. These models influence how politics is viewed as a public or private affair, and how individuals see themselves as public or private actors.

THE MULLEN'S FAMILY STORY IN THREE NARRATIVES

The bonds of the private family continue to provide the strongest challenge to the hegemony of the state in Peg Mullen's 1995 work *Unfriendly Fire: A Mother's Memoir*. The narrative explores the workings of the family, the state and patriarchy during the Vietnam era. It is distinct from the first two works in that it is a testimonial rather than fiction, and the author herself became involved in Another

Mother for Peace in 1970. There is no need for maternal symbolism in this work as Mullen is, herself, a mother whose son, Michael, was killed in Vietnam in 1970. Mullen's protest over her son's unexplained death in Vietnam reveals the patriarchal nature of the U.S. military and its ambivalence towards grieving mothers. While U.S. patriarchal culture teaches an almost sacred respect for motherhood, mothers who move out of grief and into politics are not equally welcomed. Mullen's icy reception by Pentagon officials and their resistance to her inquiries about her son's death reveal much about this attitude. According to Mullen's account, U.S. military officials were taken aback by her anger and persistence at investigating. Mullen broke from the submissive, weeping *mater dolorosa* to demand an explanation for her son's accidental death in Vietnam: "The Pentagon officials with whom I dealt must have been asking each other, 'Why isn't this woman behaving like a grieving mother's supposed to?'" (28).

Peg Mullen's willingness to break with her state to defend her family is similar to the dynamics in *Vida* and *A Walking Fire*, as well as AMP and the *Madres* in Argentina. Her role as a mother trumps her loyalty to the state. The hesitancy of her husband to break with the state suggests the complex position of males within patriarchal systems. Their very identities as men are wrapped up in loyalty to the state and especially military service. Gene Mullen, a veteran of WWII himself, seems to have experienced this as well, in his insistence that his son's casket be covered with a flag. A sealed letter discovered after Gene's death reveals a more poignant reality that he kept hidden from the public. He wrote that his son "died for no cause in this conflict with no definition" (xiv). This contrasts with his wife's affirmation that,

“I desperately need to believe that my son’s life was not wasted, that he died for some high ideal” (xiv).

Peg Mullen wrote her account, *Unfriendly Fire: A Mother’s Memoir*, years after her husband, Gene’s death. She did so only reluctantly, in part to publicize the volumes of mail that she and Gene had received over the years from other families in similar circumstances. Her work is framed as a testimonial with the forward fulfilling all of the requisite testimonials claims.

A second version of the Mullens’ story was written by journalist C.D.B. Bryan, in 1976. His 380-page book about the Mullens’ experiences is based on extensive interviews with them and the other major players in the controversy, primarily military officials and first-hand witnesses to Michael Mullen’s death in Vietnam. Bryan’s book, *Friendly Fire* is nonfiction and he explains that most of the dialogue he used was transcribed from tape recordings or from notes. Three years after Bryan’s book was published, a made-for-TV movie based on the book, was produced for ABC. *Friendly Fire*, starring Carol Burnett as Peg Mullen, was broadcast on April 22, 1979. According to reports it captured a viewing audience of 64 million Americans.

I will examine these three generic representations of the Mullens’ story in terms of four significant themes I have encountered in my analysis of politicized motherhood. First I will explore the separation of the private/public spheres. I have argued that this separation has been blurred by the actions of mothers who bring their “private” losses into the public space. I will review how Peg Mullen and her husband are portrayed, how the Vietnam conflict is depicted in terms of this binary, and what

implications exist for the deconstruction of the private/public binary. Second, I will analyze the dynamics of patriarchy in the texts. As defined in my discussions of *Vida* and *A Walking Fire*, patriarchy influences the construction of gender roles within and outside the nuclear family, and the extent to which reason and emotion are valued as lenses through which to interpret the world. It also influences the way both genders see themselves in relation to the state. I will look at how Peg, her husband and her son act within or subvert these patriarchal paradigms and how they challenge the state's construction of these roles. Third, the battle between the nuclear family and the national family for the allegiance of its members is clearly staged in this narrative. In addition, other "families" are formed and dissolved under the pressures of the War. I will examine these processes and the way that the national/nuclear family struggle evolves through these distinct genres. Finally, since all three of the narratives are based on the same story, I will examine the extent to which the strengths of the different genres are able to accurately convey the complexities of the Mullens' experience and problematize the significant issues of the war: family, the state, gender roles, patriarchy, private/public. Both of the books have forwards that explain their construction and how they got to the "truths" they are depicting. For the film, I rely on dozens of reviews and articles written about it, in which the screenplay and filming are described. Interviews with the actors and the Mullen family itself are included in these documents.

First I will examine the separation of the private/public spheres. I have argued that this separation has been blurred by the actions of U.S. mothers who, much like the Argentine *Madres*, bring their "private" losses into the public space. Peg

Mullen's testimonial has the most simplistic approach to the public/private binary. When her son was drafted and killed in Vietnam, her private life disappeared. In response, she admittedly politicized everything. She took out ads in local newspapers, urging other parents to try and save their own sons, she went on the radio, on film and in print, to inform parents that their private lives were at the mercy of public decisions. A half page newspaper ad taken out by the Mullens sought to remind the private sphere of their vulnerability: "A silent message to mothers and fathers of Iowa: We have been dying for nine, long, miserable years in Vietnam in an undeclared war....how many more lives do you wish to sacrifice because of your silence?" (Mullen 33). In a phone call from Michael before shipping out to Vietnam, reprinted in her testimony, he joins the private and the public with: "Mom—Don't stop fighting this war. You know I don't need to be here. I didn't need to be drafted" (21 Mullen). Michael explained to his mother that after a year on a U.S. army base, he understands that there were numerous ways that he could have gotten out of the draft. Much like the *Madres*, Peg Mullen spent much of her campaign exposing the illusion that there was a private sphere at all, in the face of the draft and the mounting U.S. casualties in Vietnam. The state had destroyed hers by "murdering" her son, Michael, and she was set on saving other families the same fate. To drive home the point she had Michael's tombstone read "Killed, Feb. 18, 1970" instead of the traditional "Died, Feb. 18, 1970" She also refused to allow the U.S. military to pay for her son's tombstone because they required that she inscribe the words "U.S. Army", "Sergeant," and "Vietnam" (Bryan 120). One of the clearest

examples in the text of the private/public struggle is in Gene's interactions with his Catholic priest, which I discussed earlier.

Although U. S. family life has been arguably shaped more powerfully by Protestant influences than Catholic ones, the Mullens' Catholicism is an interesting comparison to the Argentine example. As mentioned earlier, U.S. Catholicism has a distinctly more democratic character to it than the Latin American version. While Latin American Catholicism has been allied with the state until the late 20th century, U.S. Catholics tend to view their church as built on the people and are relatively less respectful of the hierarchy of the Vatican. The fact that Gene challenges his priest on the public or private nature of his views about the War speaks to a continuing conflict between the Vatican and U.S. Catholics. (As mentioned in chapter one, certain Latin American Catholics have also experienced this conflict, especially those in the liberation theology movement). A notoriously patriarchal structure, the Church has had a history of "privatizing" controversial issues so that it does not have to publicly confront individual states. The Vatican's 1980 prohibition against Catholic clergy holding elective office is an example of this division.¹¹² In the case of Gene Mullen's challenge to the Church's reticence, he discovers another institution whose familial rhetoric, much like that of the nation, is empty when it comes to real loss.

While Peg Mullen's testimony is admittedly one sided, --"When you lose your son, there is only one side" -- the film and Bryan's book problematize the private/public more thoroughly (*Friendly Fire*). Bryan enters the narrative as an outsider, observing this couple's painful struggle and asking himself: "How do you

¹¹² This development was seen in part as an attempt to control four-term U.S. Congressman Robert Drinan, whose pro-choice political platform contradicted Church dogma. In obedience to this edict, Drinan finished his final term and did not run for Congress again.

make a war personal? I hear the casualty counts, 45, 000 and my eyes glaze over” (*Friendly Fire*). In both pieces viewers/readers get to see through Bryan’s eyes that the Mullens have not been privy to information that might have explained their son’s tragic death in the detail they sought. That the government was reluctant to share such detail is explained in part by security measures necessary during war- time and in part as attempts to minimize causality counts. While the latter is certainly unflattering, it does not live up to the conspiracy theories that the Mullens concoct as they meet with more and more obfuscation around Michael’s death. Since viewers/readers get to see the Mullens through Bryan’s eyes, they are allowed to glimpse the obsessiveness with which the couple approaches the details of Vietnam. They are inundated with letters from other service families who have lost sons, and they become instantly bonded to them, abandoning many of their old friends and neighbors. They even distance their younger son, John, away with their constant discussions of Michael’s death: “I can’t listen anymore. Too much can turn you off and it’s not going to bring Michael back” (*Friendly Fire*). Their daughter is distraught that her wedding, postponed several times, is still overshadowed by her parents’ campaign against the war. By the end of the film the Mullens have eroded several family connections and have discarded several old friends and neighbors. Even though they have constructed new ties that feel like “family,” they are exhausted and ask themselves, “How can you live a lifetime of being angry? ...Are we crazy?”(*Friendly Fire*). Such questions give more depth to the Mullens in Bryan’s narrative, who seem almost supernaturally driven in Peg’s account. They also

allow that the national family, so unequivocally hostile to the nuclear one in Peg's account, may not be conspiring to dominate the nuclear one for malicious reasons.

The fact that neighbors, friends, and even family were frequently turned off by the Mullens' in-your-face campaigning does not mean that the couple was wrong about the government's strategies of adjusting the casualty numbers or the dissolution of the public/private barrier. In fact, many of the Mullen's contemporaries faced the very real chance that a son could be drafted as Michael was. Bryan's book and the film, however, show two patterns that place Peg Mullen's account in a larger context. First, neighbors and friends were sometimes turned off because they didn't want to admit that they were equally vulnerable to the tragedy that the Mullens were facing. Many of them wanted to continue believing that their sons were safe until the war came to their homes. Certainly this was a delusion that the U.S. government encouraged with its hiding of accurate causality counts. Private life –imaginary or not-- was a psychological refuge for many families with draft age sons. Several commentators on the era of repression in Argentina have noted similar reactions to the *Madres'* campaigns were probably born of defense mechanisms (O'Donnell 76).

Second, Bryan's interviews with military brass took on a different tone than the highly emotional, aggressive ones with the Mullens' couple. As he was less threatening, Bryan was able to secure information about Michael's death that his parents were not. In this way viewers/readers get to see perspectives that the Mullens do not: that the U.S. government did not actively cover up the details of Michael's death to disguise incompetence. Much of the couple's bitterness stems from their belief in this scenario and so audiences now see that at least some of Peg Mullen's

anger is misplaced. Although it probably does not make audiences question the legitimacy of the Mullen's larger warning –that the private sphere is at the mercy of the public one in times of war— it does paint a more complex portrait of the motives of public officials and the fears of private citizens, than Peg Mullen's account alone does.

The film and Bryan's book also explore how the Mullen's story disrupts the narrative of the national family, much like *Vida* and *A Walking Fire*. In the debate about the War, the national "family" was brought into direct conflict with the nuclear one. The U.S. government tried to conceal this rupture, as we learn from the Mullens' story, by purposefully concealing the number of casualties in Vietnam. The Mullens discover, after their son's death by "friendly fire" that Americans who are accidentally killed by their own forces or die of their wounds outside the battlefield, were not counted as "combat deaths." In the case of Vietnam, this amounted to a large number of deaths – 10,303 non-combat deaths, compared to 45, 958 combat deaths. Their protest against the practice of classifying deaths as non-combat led to federal legislation that changed this reporting practice.

But the Mullens' story is about much more than this procedural change. Their protest challenged the notion of the national family on several levels, and revealed the extent to which the nuclear family is still powerfully shaped by patriarchal influences. Although these dynamics are not as explicit as in the Argentine case, they have some of the same effects. First, in the film and Bryan's book, the estrangement from neighbors and friends that the Mullens experience in challenging the government speaks to the tension created when one member of the national "family" speaks out

against the War. The Mullens persist in valuing their nuclear family (and their lost son) over the tranquility of the national family (as exemplified by their long term friends and neighbors). They even begin to form a new “family” with the relatives of other service men killed in Vietnam, much like the *Madres* did with other members of their group. In words that echo those of several *Madres*’ testimonies, Peg Mullen describes that, “I feel closer to all those mothers and fathers who wrote to us than to [their old friends who won’t challenge the War]” (*Friendly Fire*). When they break with those old friends and start to form new alliances they are saying that their nuclear and ideological families are more important than the national family, whose legitimacy they have discarded.

In terms of male citizenship, it is also significant that Gene, himself a veteran of WWII, is shown in the film and Bryan’s book turning against the state as he learns more about his son’s death. Although rejecting a military burial, Gene initially accepts that Michael’s casket be covered by an American flag.¹¹³ But as he learns more about his death, Gene breaks with the role of the patriotic male citizen, refusing to accept the Bronze Star for his son and going to Michael’s grave on Memorial day to pull out an American flag that veterans groups had placed there. The portrayal of the father as the emotional, weeping parent, and Peg as the strong, rational one adds to the deconstruction of traditional gender roles inside the nuclear family as well as outside, in the “family” of the nation.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Peg Mullen was opposed to his, explaining in her account that “The casket was adorned with a flag, only because Michael’s father insisted. I was ready to burn it” (28).

¹¹⁴ Carol Burnett, who played Peg Mullen in the film version says she was struck, upon reading the script, by “how contrary their roles were to a stereotypical couple....Peg Mullen was the one who had all the facts and talked like a bat out of hell and was very stoical, and her husband was the emotional one.” (Gamarekian 1979).

Finally, the tension between Peg and her younger son, John, whom she tries to protect from the draft, speaks to the clash between genders in national constructions of proper gender roles. Having lost her oldest son in Vietnam, she intervenes to protect her younger one from the draft, to which he responds angrily: “Mother, don’t fight my war! I can take care of it myself...I’ll handle the draft board.” Peg seems oblivious to this tension, which she does not represent at all in her account: “I was never aware of any estrangement from anyone in my family until I read Bryan’s opinion in his unedited manuscript...I’m sure I could have taken more time to listen to my children. We discussed Michael constantly but didn’t talk about how each of us was dealing with his death” (*Unfriendly Fire*, 102).

Katherine Kinney points out that the trope of “friendly fire” and its literal meaning –Americans killing Americans—is one that is present in diverse representations of the Vietnam war –in plays, novels, oral histories, and films. The practice of “fragging” –the intentional killing of superior officers—is a particularly common component of the larger trope of “friendly fire” in representations of Vietnam. Kinney argues that this trope is a metaphor for the larger controversy around the War and for the unsettling changes in traditional gender and racial roles that were occurring in this time: “the ubiquity of the fragging plot reflects the war’s deeper connection to the contemporary domestic challenges to traditional American authority. The perceived breakdown of American world hegemony in Vietnam occurred concurrently with an attack on the categories that defined and upheld that power: race and gender...the trope of ‘friendly fire,’testifies to the subversion of traditional American orders of meaning” (4-5). Although Kinney does not analyze

the 1979 production of *Friendly Fire*, I find her argument useful for viewing the break down of the concept of family in this Vietnam .

In light of Kinney's argument that the Vietnam war was really about Americans fighting themselves, we can see that the Mullens' nuclear family was a site of conflict around patriarchal gender roles within the family. While Peg is non-traditional in being the less emotionally demonstrative in her marriage, her actions are clearly motivated by her maternal grief and her challenge to the state's right to Michael's life fits with my readings of political motherhood patterns.¹¹⁵ Her husband's initial ambivalence around the campaign against the US government makes him a more complex character than Peg's. A war veteran himself, a farmer who values tradition and ancestry, Gene is stoic his goodbye to Michael at the airport. He passes him a Catholic medallion that he wore during WWII, which he believes protected him, placing him symbolically in the patriarchal tradition of the Catholic Church. But after Michael's death, Gene becomes the more emotional in the marriage, weeping frequently and shouting at his parish priest. His ambivalence around the use of the American flag and his Catholic faith, as well as his anger at the U.S. government's stonewalling, all speak to deeper conflicts about his role as a traditional man in conflict with patriarchal institutions.

The Mullen's younger son, John, also embodies this conflict. He is clearly humiliated by his mother's public attempts to protect him from the draft and torn by his parents' ongoing battle with the state. He is in the awkward position of being still

¹¹⁵ The screen writer and producer of the *Friendly Fire* film, Kay Fanin admits that it terms of characters, what she likes "men who have emotion and show it. It's putting down both sexes to say emotion is the precinct of women....I don't think there is such a thing as a 'woman's' story. When men say that emotion is the precinct for women I resent that" (qtd. in Robertson).

young enough to live at the farm within the family unit but old enough to face national duty to serve in the war. He is also painfully aware of his community's rejection of his parents, "I can tell they think Mom is making too much of a fuss" (*Friendly Fire*). The recent death of his older brother draws him closer into the family unit in both emotional and practical terms: his parents need his physical help on the farm and, as Bryan reminds him in the film, when John storms out of the house "they need you [emotionally]" as well.

The final lens through which we can compare these three texts is that of testimony. All three of them make testimonial claims, but each is colored by the unique components of their genre. Peg's 1995 account is clearly sold as a testimonial, with historian Albert E. Stone writing the forward and authorizing Peg as a reliable witness:

"What is clear from Peg Mullen's version is her utter reliance upon personal experience and belief.... Peg remains true to herself – a brave, determined, honest, a deeply scarred mother" (xv). Peg herself positions her story as representative of the experiences of many more American families during the war. She describes how the letters she received from families all over the U.S. "convinced me that I needed to tell our story, as that of only one family of the forgotten people in the Vietnam War" (xviii). True to the testimonial genre, Mullen tries to create a community in the readers and inspire a larger movement for social change by telling her story. By the time it is published the Vietnam War has been over for almost twenty years but Mullen sees that the lessons of Vietnam have not been learned. As Stone puts it, "For *her* identity becomes *our* shared loss and delusion among the mysteries and meanings

of one ‘accidental’ death in a far off war and the accompanying civilian conflicts at home“ (xii). But Mullen does not only look back, but forward as well: “Peg Mullen’s struggle to confront this challenge leads to a bitter cultural diagnosis: the U.S has become a thoroughgoing war culture. Further, anyone who dares to declare this ‘truth’ openly risks treatment as an enemy” (xiii). Her experiences of harassment by political opponents and police brutality in 1971 make her a political mother who can speak first hand about the patriarchal culture of the U.S. during the Vietnam era.

Another strength of the testimonial genre is that Peg Mullen gets to narrate the state’s response to her protest. As in *A Walking Fire* and *Vida*, the ambivalence that surrounds the political mother is often expressed in hostility towards her. Frequently critics of such mothers invoke images of traditional motherhood --patriotism, courage, self-sacrifice-- in order to shame mothers who dare to question national policy. Mullen recounts how she spoke on a radio show and was overwhelmed by negative callers: ”They repeatedly accused us of dishonoring our fallen sons and acting like crybabies. After all, they argued, thousands of other mothers had lost sons, and they weren’t going on talk shows to criticize our government and its policies (Mullen 62). The political mother is attacked on several fronts here: she’s a bad mother, too emotional, self-centered and disloyal to the state. In addition she should not be speaking in public, as one listener commented after hearing Mullen speak in 1990 about the Gulf War: “ ‘Mrs. Mullen, president Bush is our leader and if he commands us to go to war, we obey. And in our culture women do not have opinions, and if by chance they do have opinions, they remain silent’” (*Unfriendly Fire* 129). All of these critiques can be traced back to the binaries upon which the nuclear family

(and the patriarchal state) rest: private/public, domestic/professional, emotion/reason, and traitor/patriot. When political mothers blur these lines they are chastised for not staying within their proper places and even vilified as threatening the stability of the state. Such extreme reactions certainly show how threatened the state and its traditional followers feel by the political mother.

Peg's role as Michael's mother and her claim to tell the truth in the context of many other families' experiences give her text, though published almost twenty years later, the greatest claim to testimonial value. The strength of her account lies in how she weaves her family's experiences into the stories of the thousands of American families who lost sons in Vietnam. She excerpts numerous letters from such families who wrote to her during her campaign, arguing that, "the real truth of Vietnam and some awful truth about war in general are contained in the mass of communications that came to us as a result of the book and the movie" (112).

Another powerful strategy that parallels the *Madres* is Peg Mullen's use of her son's own words to argue against the war. First she includes letters from Michael in which he describes how his fellow soldiers hope the anti-war demonstrations escalate: "Most of the troops (grunts), E-6s and below, hope that things get wilder at home...Militarily I kind of feel that all hell is going to break loose after Christmas and Nixon will be on attack" (147). Later Michael expresses a lack of faith in the larger U.S. mission: "As to Nixon's vietnamization, it will eventually fail –our front line troops have little faith in the ARVN....."¹¹⁶ (147) Numerous letters refer directly to President Nixon's approach to Vietnam: "I am glad to see that the president is having

¹¹⁶ I assume that ARNV stands for the Army of the Republic of North Vietnam but Mullen's text does not elaborate.

some pressure put on him but am sure he will just turn away.... The whole entire mess is a joke. I don't believe the NVA wants to fight"¹¹⁷ (144).

The most explicit appropriation of Michael's voice by his mother is indirect. After his death Michael's body is accompanied back to the U.S. by a young soldier, Tom, who was a childhood friend of Michael's. After the burial Mullen reports that "As we said our thanks and good-byes, [Tom] put his arms around me. 'Please, Mrs. Mullen, 'he said, 'don't give up. Protest this war'" (28). Given the dramatic circumstances, Tom seems to speak for Michael, who can no longer speak. Since Peg Mullen is the only one to hear this message, she gains the authority to speak for her son, which she does for the next thirty-five years. Albert E. Stone's forward emphasizes Mullen's role as an intermediary with his assertion (much like the *Madres*) that "her son who died needlessly in Vietnam keeps whispering to her, 'Don't give up. Protest this war'" (Forward, xv).

From a purely testimonial standpoint, C.D. B. Bryan makes similar claims to the truth value of his book *Friendly Fire*. Although he admits that he did not witness the events of the book first hand, he says that all of the scenes are drawn from interviews with witnesses, or from historical records or correspondence with participants. He creates an expectation that the accuracy of the book approaches the testimonial standard by attesting that "all the major people in this story have read the finished manuscript and have expressed their agreement with the incidents as described" (8). He even goes further to say that "I am confident that what I have written is true and that the events, scenes and conversations took place as depicted" (8). Although Bryan never explicitly states that the Mullens' story is representative of

¹¹⁷ I assume NVA stands for North Vietnamese Army but Mullen's text does not elaborate.

other families' experiences, his crusade to tell their story –he took five years to write his book— suggests that he saw their narrative as having larger significance.

Despite this, his narrative has a fictional quality to it with elaborate descriptions and dialogue that is quoted word for word. Bryan admits that he “reconstructed” some of this dialogue in specific scenes –including a lengthy one depicting the night of Michael’s death. His account reads more like a novel with the interior thoughts of participants exposed, as if there were an omniscient narrator. Although this format should make careful readers more skeptical of his narrative, it makes the account easier to read and so probably reached a larger audience than Peg’s book.

Finally, the film *Friendly Fire* is based on the book by Bryan, and was converted into a screenplay by Fay Kanin, at the time the President of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Kanin, who also produced the show, explains that she spent three or four months listening to all the tape recordings that Bryan made of conversations with the Mullens in order to write the screenplay (Robertson).

¹¹⁸ While the film is a docudrama and so admits to loosely interpreting events of real life, it still shares two elements with the books on the same subject. It has a testimonial quality to it –the screenwriter says that she listened to hours upon hours of Bryan’s taped conversations with the Mullens, and that she approved the script with the Mullen’s family before it was aired. In addition, the film was heralded by many reviewers as significant for the wider community of the nation. Television reviewer Tom Shales wrote in the *Washington Post* that: “it’s better than ‘Deer Hunter’ and

¹¹⁸ Kanin acknowledges in this interview that the death of her own son from leukemia in 1958 was part of what drew her to Peg Mullen’s story.

‘Coming Home’ put together and it could have a greater effect on the country since 50 or 60 Americans may tune into watch it on the same night, ‘Friendly Fire’ has the impact of a death in the family.” Another *Post* critic, Lawrence Laurent, points to the broader reflections on Vietnam that the film provokes: “How much of us died with [Michael]? It is a question that millions of viewers will be asking themselves after they finish watching ‘Friendly Fire.’”

The film cannot adequately be characterized without reference to the large amount of press it received. The piece was clearly considered significant from social and historical angles with multiple newspapers and magazines running commentary on it. According to ABC executive, Brandon Stoddard, “we spent a great deal of time and effort selling it beyond the normal four days and the TV guide ads” (Gitlin 160). It received favorable reviews in the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and the *New York Times*, among others.

Film and television critic Jane Feuer positions *Friendly Fire* in the same wave of trauma drama that was popularized in the 1980s and accompanied President Ronald Reagan’s “victims’ rights” approach to crime. She compares the film to two 1983 TV movies “Adam” and “M.A.D.D.: Mothers Against Drunk Drivers”: family is traumatized by the loss of a child, finds government or private institutions negligent or hostile to their cries, family creates an organization or support group to publicize their plight and remedy circumstances. Feuer argues that the final step is that “normality is restored.” In my view this means that the nuclear family is reconciled with the national one in which tougher laws signal that the values of the nuclear family are recognized by the state. While this trajectory can be traced in “M.A.D.D.”

and “Adam,” both of which led to the passage of legislation that protected citizens, *Friendly Fire* was shown after the Vietnam war had ended and so there was little that viewers could do to end the Mullens’ pain.¹¹⁹ There is no reconciliation of the national family at the end of this film. While laws are changed regarding the reporting of non-combat deaths in Vietnam the bitterness that the Mullens feel towards the government and the military is never assuaged. They even break with C.D.B. Bryan, who covered their story for years and wrote a book about it. He realizes in the film the Mullens cannot let go and “be able to put [Michael’s death] to rest ...” In one *New York Times* article that is frequently overlooked, the real Gene Mullen reports that he and Peg watched the film on TV, even after telling producer Fay Kanin that they would not view it. A rarely cited quote from Gene explains: “We saw it... We loved it. I think we can stop crying now” (Roberston).

The second significant theme I see in *Friendly Fire* is positioning of the nuclear family against the national one. The Mullens have to confront numerous institutions that represent the hegemony of the state – the military, their elected officials, veterans groups, even their friends who make political choices not to oppose the war. I see these as instances of the nuclear family challenging the “family” of the nation-state (in its various forms). Feuer sees this as part of a trend to shift responsibility from large government to smaller, local initiatives –a pattern emphasized by Reagan’s administration. Significantly, this was accompanied by a promotion of “family values” by Reagan supporters— which I read as “state values” integrated into the family through the ideological state apparatus. French philosopher,

¹¹⁹ *Adam* led to the passage of the Federal Missing Child Act and *M.A.D.D.* led to the passage of various state laws that instituted tougher sanctions for drunk driving. Adam Walsh’s father, John Walsh, also created the popular TV show, *America’s Most Wanted*, in which he starred.

Louis Althusser listed schools, community centers, churches and other civic organizations as powerful sites of such interpolations. The trend towards docu-dramas in which a family (victimized by negligent or corrupt public institutions) starts its own advocacy group in response to a personal tragedy reflects two divergent trends: First, the family becomes a site of agency. The bonds that inspire parents or siblings to act are based in the connections built from the intimacy of the nuclear family. This can make the family a powerful rival to the state (as it does in *Friendly Fire*). It can also make the family a site of interpolation when the state is able to dominate the structure and value system of the family (as Reagan's administration attempted to do). Feuer argues that the New Right's construction of politicized motherhood functioned within this paradigm. Only mothers had the "moral righteousness necessary to the task: therefore they would "always, reluctantly...take on a masculine role for the sake of their victimized children" (31). At the same time the promotion of "family values" had the added effect of synchronizing national and family values, and making the family less of a threat to the state. Ordinary citizens were doing more of the work of big government (which made them feel like they had agency) but they were still being managed ideologically by conservative agendas.

I think the film is more properly viewed as straddling two eras: the earlier Vietnam one and the emerging conservative family values one. The first is still integrating the loss and meaninglessness of the Vietnam War into the collective memory of the nation. I would extend Kinney's attention to the trope of 'friendly fire' --as symbolizing the self-inflicted wounds of the war— to the wounds of the national family turned upon itself. The fact that the film was widely promoted by

ABC before its showing, was viewed on television by a very large audience and received wide popular attention, speaks to the importance of dealing with the fallout of the war in the national consciousness. The later era integrates heroic actions on the part of civil society, which are acknowledged by a benevolent, if incompetent state. This acknowledgement and the passage of legislation that aided such victims' rights groups reconciled the activists to their state, and then brings them back into the national family.

While I agree with Feuer that *Friendly Fire* fits in with the narrative structure of several victims' rights docudramas of the 1980s, I don't see it fitting in completely with the schema she describes. First, the film showed the triumph of the family over tragedy that was caused by the state –inept at managing the Vietnam. In *Adam* and *MADD*, activist families fight against wrongs perpetuated by evil-doers who were not sufficiently punished by the state. Their protest of the state was more along the lines of neglect, which is shown to be remedied by private citizens' actions –which in the end reconcile them to the “improved” state. The Mullen's story portrays the state itself as the wrong-doer and although the deceptive reporting practices of the U.S. government are exposed and corrected, the family is left with a bitter taste. They are broken and exhausted by their fight against the government. In contrast, according to Feuer, the Walshes (*Adam*) and the Lightners (*M.A.D.D.*) are energized by their ability to work with the government to effect change.

DOCUMENTARIES

Although ABC's *Friendly Fire* had one of the largest viewing audiences for its time, three smaller Vietnam documentaries provide important glimpses at the conflict between the mother and the state during war. Two argued against the War and one is a propaganda film narrated by then-president Lyndon Johnson, justifying the War. Made in 1965 by the Department of Defense, "Why Vietnam?" was directed at American mothers, who were the imagined audience. The film was also shown to U.S. military personnel before they were shipped to Vietnam. It details American interest in Vietnam in primarily ideological terms in the context of the Cold War, glorifying burgeoning democracy in South Vietnam and vilifying North Vietnam's Communist regime under Ho Chi Minh. The lurking threat of Communist China is detailed as part of a growing trend in S.E. Asia, painting a menacing picture of the "domino effect." While he presents these threats in stark terms, President Johnson strikes an intentionally familial tone with his listeners. The U.S. is a "family" because of shared values like democracy and loyalty. Our commitments to the South Vietnamese are based on these principles. To keep our ideological "family" in tact, we must honor the tradition of our forefathers: "We are in Vietnam to fulfill one of the most solemn pledges of the American nation—a promise of three presidents over eleven years." Johnson paints himself as a seasoned patriarch, pained by the losses of his "sons" in battle, but rational enough to see that it will all be worth it: "I do not find it easy to send the flower of our youth into battle but as long as there are men who hate and destroy, we must have the courage to resist." Despite his tendency to intellectualize, Johnson's writers use the language of emotion to address their most

skeptical viewers: American mothers. The President starts his narration with an anecdote about a mother from the Midwest who writes to him for an explanation of the U.S.'s role in Vietnam. The mother is positioned in the ambivalent state that many American mothers experienced around the conflict. She is a patriot (she explains that she supported her husband's service in WWII) but now her son is fighting in Vietnam, and she does not have the same clarity about the purpose. Johnson reads several sections from her respectful, earnest letter about her concerns. She closes the letter with " [Vietnam] is just something that I don't understand. Why? Why Vietnam?" Her questions give Johnson a chance to frame the national narrative in historic and ideological terms that even a mother can understand. While the film is filled with historical and economic trends, it is also a poignant story of humanity -- that of the South Vietnamese people. Food, elections, and human rights are all concerns in South Vietnam to which we should attend. These issues, along with the threat of encroaching Communism explain why "one half world away has become our front door." The fact that Johnson focuses on a mother's letter (which was more likely a composite of several letters or drafted entirely by his writers) shows his recognition of the power of mothers. His paternal tone and construction of the current military action as part of the national narrative brings listeners back to the familial model. The benevolent patriarch acknowledges the emotional concerns of his charges (women and mothers in particular) but gently guides them to refocus on the larger framing --rooted in the family of the nation. Significantly Johnson warns against deceptive family imagery like that of Ho Chi Minh who "plays the kindly, smiling grandfather" --shown in footage being swarmed by young children. He closes

his thirty-two minute talk in a tone reminiscent of Franklin Roosevelt's fireside chats, bringing the listeners back into the family circle with his final words: "This, then, my fellow Americans, is why we are in Vietnam."

In direct contrast to Johnson's piece, "And Another Family for Peace" was made by a Quaker group and AMP, and profiled five families who were touched by the Vietnam War, with four of them revealing some element of this tension. What is striking in this film is the different ways that the mothers (and some fathers) deal with the challenges of the call to service in Vietnam. Although the film clearly sympathizes with anti-war sentiment, several unguarded moments in taping reveal the ambivalence of family members towards the nation and nationally proscribed gender roles.

One traditional, military family has five sons and three have served in Vietnam, one having died there. Now the father, himself a veteran, refuses to let another son be drafted. "It's over for us...this family has been torn up by this war and if they take our other two boys ..." He swears that he will take the family to Canada rather than risk losing another son. His stance breaks with what would be expected in the model of a patriarchal veteran –pride in sacrifice and honor in death. Clearly his son's death has complicated these paradigms for him and shown that the interests of the state are not always the interests of the family. His wife's response is more moderate and tempered by her location in a spiritual narrative. She gestures towards the state with: "After John's death they gave us seven gold stars... one for each of our kids..." Her tone is markedly ambivalent. There is a hint of pride in the award but a melancholic reflection on the pain that is now shared with her four other children.

The state's acknowledgement means something to her but apparently not enough as she finds refuge in a spiritual narrative: "Tom and I are very religious and that's what has saved us... I realize that my son's in heaven and that we will join him some day."

A second mother has a son who went to jail rather than go to Vietnam. She reflects that his choice has caused tension with her neighbors who "don't know how to act" now that her "son is a convict." His betrayal of the family of the nation is heavily stigmatized in her community. The mother also draws attention to the divisions of class within the national family with her assertion that Conscientious Objector status is "only for the educated." The tendency of nationalist rhetoric to whitewash difference around class and race is well documented.¹²⁰

A third mother in the film is a teacher in a local high school, an integral part of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus. Her son's plane went down in Vietnam and he has been a prisoner there for three years. Her school curriculum includes a unit on S.E. Asia but she now admits that "I can't be objective ... so can I teach?" Her roles as a mother and a teacher place her at the junction of the family and the state. She acknowledges now that she would likely have chosen the family over the state if she could turn back time. With her son still a prisoner, though, her tone is also ambivalent. Like so many other mothers of soldiers, she sees herself as responsible for her son and wonders if she had told her son more about "what war is like and perhaps he ..."

¹²⁰ Working class people often did not know about Conscientious Objector status, or how to claim it. AMP admits that it did a poor job of reaching out to non-white, non-middle class mothers during its campaign, according to my interviews with Cora Weiss. Peg Mullen mentions in her book that she was insensitive to class difference at the beginning of her protest but became more attuned to it with experience.

Peg Mullen, who also appears in the film, is more explicit about her regrets: “I feel that --although 25 years old-- I should have protected my son ... They’d have to drag him over my dead body to make him go now.” Among the four mothers interviewed Peg is the most willing to expose the family/state conflict and confront the state. She narrates her transformation upon hearing of Michael’s death: “I became the angriest mother in the world. That’s when my protest began.”

In one final profile the national call to fight has altered gender roles within a young family when the man returns from the Vietnam War missing a leg. The soldier, a former rodeo rider, details the changes in his capacities and independence, and the adjustments that he and his wife have had to make. He now opposes the war but is unwilling (or unable) to blame national forces, explaining that “I’m not bitter against anyone –except the way things are –the war has got to be stopped.” His ambiguity may disguise a conflict that many males experience in relation to their roles in the national family.

The film is clearly slanted towards anti-war activists. The narrative ends with the assertion that “You can do something: write to Another Mother for Peace. A million voices raised together will be heard.” Despite this bias the film is a valuable window on the conflict that ordinary citizens experience when facing the competing demands of state and family. It also reveals how gender inflects such experiences and how closely national narratives around gender shape the roles and expectations of citizens.

A second anti-Vietnam film directed towards mothers of the era is “You Don’t Have to Buy War, Mrs. Smith,” starring Bess Myerson, a former Miss America and

Commissioner of Consumer Affairs at the time of the film. The film uses several strategies that end up highlighting the state/family conflict. First, it works to deconstruct phrases that have allowed citizens to think about Vietnam only in nationalist terms. Myerson critiques the use of terms like “free world,” “loyalty,” and “peace keeping actions” in the rhetoric of the administration. She argues convincingly that the government controls the way in which these terms are defined and applied. Certainly Althusser would agree that this is part of the mechanism of the Ideological State Apparatus and Myerson exposes this strategy powerfully. “Loyalty” could be applied not just to the state but to one’s personal principles or one’s nuclear family: “loyalty to [one’s] country meant loyalty to whatever policy the administration concocted, regardless of how disastrous.”(*You Don’t Have to Buy War*). “Freedom” could also refer to the agency with which men decide (or refuse) to fight for their nation.

Myerson’s second goal is to inspire women/mothers to use their consumer power to end the war. Playing into the tendency of middle class mothers/wives to be the ones making household purchases, Myerson lists numerous well-known companies and their linkages to the defense industry: “Alcoa, General Electric, Whirlpool, Motorola, General Motors, Westinghouse... Let’s tell them where we’re really at. We consumers must stop buying war.” It is ironic that Myerson leans on the domestic patterns of middle class women at the same time that she encourages them to blur the public/private boundary in their political actions. While it suggests that AMP’s roots were not tightly bound to the second wave of feminism –which critiqued middle-class women’s domestic isolation—it also could also reflect the composition

of AMP which was relatively more rural than other female anti-war groups.¹²¹ It also allows her audience to comfortably straddle dual identities –political activist and homemaker.

The rhetoric of Myerson’s speech also encourages women/mothers to see themselves as citizens with the power to impact the progress of the war. While the traditional public/private divide had given women citizenship on very limited terms, AMP calls upon women to insert themselves into public dialogue around the war. But it doesn’t call for a revolution in the notion of citizenship, just a recognition of rights that have been there all along. “As taxpayers, we’re the biggest consumers of all…” Nor does it dismantle the traditional government’s structure, but encourages women to think more critically about their leaders. “You don’t have to buy the clichés of peace keeping actions and falling dominos, Mrs. Smith…Where is the democracy that our sons are fighting for?”

Finally, Myerson’s speech plays on the maternal bond that inspired so many of the audience to join AMP. She highlights the obvious concern that mothers have for their sons-- “How many more cemeteries will we be buying for our sons?”—but places it in an informed political context in which mothers can take active political roles. They can be careful consumers, lobbyists to their representatives and agitators towards big business. For AMP motherhood (or femaleness) does not foreclose such activities or sully the purity of the traditional mother.

Although Myerson uses essentialist framings to drive home her point --

¹²¹ The most notable comparison is to Women Strike for Peace, which was more urban-oriented and tended to attract more progressive women (Weiss).

“Those who give life have an obligation to preserve it”—it is only loosely associated with traditional gender roles. Unlike nationalist rhetoric, which saw loyal mothers as domestic servants, raising a nation of new citizens, AMP’s middle class mothers could buy products that didn’t feed the war machine. They were still in somewhat limited domestic roles but they had power because they could “stop buying war.”

Paradoxically, Myerson’s lobby for an end to the war takes on a nationalist approach at times. She creates a frame in which South Vietnam is competing with U.S. citizens for its own resources. In suggesting an “us vs. them” paradigm, she seems to destroy the vision of transnational maternal alliances: “The enemy is *here* – it’s smog, it’s hunger, it’s despair—while our sons have been sent out to fight the enemy out *there*... While millions of our children go to bed hungry, we are spending money on weapons, chemicals, etc.” Despite this inconsistency maternalist groups like Women Strike for Peace did establish such alliances with Vietnamese mothers, send representatives to Hanoi in 1969 (Weiss; Swerdlow).

CONCLUSION

In the end family life really is private –love, unselfishness, sexual intimacy, genuine sacrifice of members for each other. And it really is public: its members can bring with them all of the dynamics that they learned in the public sphere, including patriarchal relations (violence, hierarchy, strict rationality). Additionally, the public really can invade the private –the conscription of U.S. soldiers for the Vietnam War is a painful example of this. So are the construction of gender roles in ways that benefit the state, and the reproduction of those roles in the traditional nuclear family. The

history of patriarchy, with deep roots in Western European political and religious traditions, has clearly informed the construction of relations between the family and the state, as well as gendered interactions within the private sphere itself.

Private family ties, however, can be powerful forces, enabling members to stand up to the state and refuse its orders. The texts I reviewed reveal some of the nuances of the relationship of the family to the state, and how these are shaped by constructions of proper gender identity within the nation. Traditional paradigms around gender roles inevitably reify the state's dominance. Real men prove themselves by serving the state –frequently in battle. Real women do the same by serving their men, raising their children and conveniently producing loyal citizens. Women who step out of this model and into the public sphere as political subjects or even independent thinkers are a serious threat to the nuclear family and to the stability of the state. Men who step out of line are a similar threat but this is less frequent given the powerful stigma associated with such a move. Fathers who must face losing their sons in war occupy a particularly challenging space.

Mothers are particularly troublesome citizens for the strength of their association with private life. Childrearing is no doubt a very intimate experience and produces emotional bonds that are very powerful. For mothers (and sisters in *A Walking Fire*) such bonds have inspired them to dismiss the public/private divide and challenge their state's right to their sons/brothers' lives. In the process they upset many of the systems that are connected to this binary: masculine/feminine, domestic/professional, sacred/secular, emotion/reason, political/familial. In the end they reveal several illusions propagated by the state: that the family is a private unit,

free of the influence of the state; and that private family roles, like motherhood, cannot also be powerful political identities.

The two novels reveal that the “choice” for mothers between the family and the state is not nearly as clear as we might expect. Mothers are also influenced by patriarchal ideology and they are not immune to the seduction of the “national family,” especially if it is defined as a larger version of their own nuclear family. The desire for meaning in loss is a powerful human tendency and should not be underestimated. A mother who loses her son in war may need to believe that his loss contributed to some greater good, especially if her community promotes this vision and she needs their support. But even for mothers who have not experienced such loss, these novels also suggest that the most public, political women continue to find value in the private sphere that has been so long associated with the traditional, nuclear family.

While *Vida* proposes alternative family models we see that patriarchy still dominates women/mothers in such groups and that childbearing becomes a choice that is seen as detracting from political action. Many of these women are caught between their desire to mother and the construction of political action in Left wing groups as incompatible with the traditional nuclear family. Female activists must choose whether they will be mothers or political actors. The irony is that these Left wing 1960s and 1970s groups viewed themselves as progressive with respect to gender issues.

In *Vida* the central mother breaks from the male group to form a mother’s group that acknowledges the importance of motherhood to her identity and allows her

to be politically active. At the same time she divorces her husband, in part over her political activities, implying that public politics or private motherhood continue to be mutually exclusive in her community. At the same time the women in *Vida* re-affirm their belief in the nuclear family as a unit that provides emotional and psychological stability for women and children. Many of them make painful choices to preserve the private, family sphere, some of them abandoning revolutionary politics to this end. For none of the women/mothers in *Vida* is the choice a clear one, especially as their alternative community sees itself in opposition to the state. Most of them end up living in the space between these two loci and making daily compromises to the private patriarchy that surrounds them while fighting to maintain their public, political agency.

The main character in *A Walking Fire* is similarly situated between her desire to be political and her connection to her very traditional, nuclear family. Her opposition to the state is born in her desire to protect her brothers' lives as they fight in Vietnam. But her family sees it as a betrayal with the family patriarch priding himself on his own service and his sons' valor. Cora can see her family's interpolation by the patriarchal state in ways that they cannot –in part because they are all males. Her maternal/female position puts her in a unique space, perceiving the masculinist values in her family and her political group in ways that male members do not.

Cora's disownment from her biological family never leaves her psyche as she lives in exile in Canada and she makes the ultimate sacrifice of her political narrative in returning to visit her ailing father. The legacies of Cora's mother

(suicide) and Aunt Min (passive, domestic) suggest figures who succumbed entirely to the patriarchy/state and left no political imprint. Much like the women in *Vida* Cora must live in the liminal space between these two poles as she reconciles with her biological family. In the process she, too, acknowledges that she has never given up on the idea of family as a private space with benefits that the public sphere can never provide. Much like *Vida*, *A Walking Fire* depicts the diverse ways in which activist women of the 1960s and 1970s negotiated their changing social and political roles, and discovered motherhood as a space of profound tension around these issues.

The three versions of Peg and Gene Mullen's story contribute to the landscape of the Vietnam era in several ways. Peg's story is obviously the most dramatic example of a mother in direct conflict with the state. C.D.B. Bryan's account lets us see how this tension impacts the males of the family. Gene transforms from a proud veteran to an angry, but powerless father in the face of his own state, and his second son, John, clashes with his mother's politics when he is called to serve in Vietnam. Bryan's version also gives us glimpses of the exclusion of the Mullen family from the community of their rural town as they become more vocal in their opposition to state. Such scenes reify the trope of the "family" of the nation, with harsh penalties for those who speak out against the family.

My comparison of the three Mullen pieces also reveals the complexities of the testimonial genre and the power of visual representation, especially television. While none of the versions explicitly contradicts another, their distinct emphases and omissions show us how subjective testimonials really are. The power of the made-for-TV version is striking in its viewership, 64 million, and its subsequent coverage in the

popular press. Its reception suggests that the themes it explores struck a chord with many Americans in the era.

The three documentaries I review serve as snapshots of the ways in which the complex issues of Vietnam were uncovered in public discourse. The rhetoric of the national family is most powerfully captured in Johnson's *Why Vietnam?* which was not accidentally directed towards mothers of U.S. soldiers. The potential for political action by mothers who were not bent on systemic reforms --of patriarchy or capitalism-- is best found in Myerson's film on consumer action and intelligent maternalism. One doesn't have to be a bra-burning radical to have a political voice and mothers have unique social capital at their disposal. "And Another Family for Peace" provides a look at the diverse ways that the family/state struggle has impacted individual families. Its intimate conversations with families who paid heavy prices for the war reveal several surprising details: a military father who is ready to take his surviving sons to Canada; a one-legged soldier who opposes the War but can't support the state; a school teacher caught between her history class and her son's captivity in Vietnam; a mother estranged from her community for her son's refusal to serve. All of these narratives fall somewhere in between two well-defined poles: the nationalist mother who wears her Gold Star with pride and the radicalized mother who dismisses all allegiance to the state.

None of the motherhood narratives that I explore in the U.S. conform exactly to the standoff that I had initially theorized between the mother and the state. The influences of patriarchy on the nuclear family and mothers' continued allegiance to that family create complex struggles within the family itself. The construction of

males as political subjects by the patriarchal state strengthens their national orientation. Diverse forces collude to intensify many mothers' orientation towards the private nuclear family. But these same mothers find themselves uniquely qualified to speak out about their children's service to the public national "family." The result is conflict on many levels: feelings of betrayal, charges of disloyalty, challenges to traditional roles. As my texts have shown, the political mother of the Vietnam era was at the center of this firestorm. While the phenomenon of politicized mothers did not resolve any of these complexities it clarified several elements that had been previously conflated or hidden: the nuclear family and the state do, at times, have conflicting interests; U.S. citizenship is constructed in terms of gender: citizens are either male or female; the construction of military service as central to masculinity makes it harder for males to chose the nuclear family over the national one; emotion can, in certain circumstances, be a productive epistemological grounding; the construction of the private and public as distinct spheres has many advantages to patriarchal powers, but this does not mean we should dismiss this division; essentialism can be used strategically, in the case of mothers, for political ends.

Chapter 5: The Private/Public Mother: Beyond Strategic Essentialism

For many women in cultures around the world, motherhood is a powerful political identity around which they have galvanized broad-based and influential grassroots movements for social change

-Annelise Orleck¹²²

At one level my study of political motherhood is about gender construction and the rights of women to participate fully in the political decision-making of their states. My exploration of a wide range of texts around the politicized mother has examined the social and cultural environments that have inflected the construction of gender differently in the United States and Argentina. This comparison also explores how strategic essentialism can be used to unify diverse groups around a common agenda. The organizational and discursive strategies of both these mothers' groups are examples of how this phenomenon enabled the women to maximize the impact of their shared identity. The success of these two groups also responds to the paralysis that contemporary identity politics has engendered in some forms of grass roots organizing. On a theoretical level their successes defend feminist formulations of the subject --in the form of the mother-- against post-structuralist thinkers like Foucault who would argue that she doesn't exist.

At another level this project is about the division of the private and public spheres and the ways that patriarchy has used that division to try to limit the power of a particularly problematic category of citizen, the mother. As discussed in previous

¹²² *The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices from Left to Right*, eds. Alexis Jetter, Annelise Orleck, Diana Taylor (7)

chapters, the figure of the mother is located at the juncture of the public and the private. At times she appears to occupy both spheres, creating ambivalence in a variety of groups: patriarchal governments, civilian observers, and nationalist mothers among them.

In the 1960s-1980s patriarchal institutions in the United States and Argentina may have held a monopolies on authority through repressive state apparatus – drafting young Americans into the Vietnam War and imprisoning Argentine citizens— but they were never able to completely control power.¹²³ Max Weber’s definition of power is a good descriptor of what the mothers were able to marshal: “the ability to act effectively on persons or things, to make or secure favorable decisions which are not of right allocated to the individuals or their roles.”¹²⁴ Although the mothers had no formal authority –they were not politicians, lawyers or journalists—they were able to garner a lot of public interest and media attention, which pressured formal institutions to change their positions. The fact that much of “mothering” takes place in the private space of the home and that its practices are qualitatively different from much of the competitive, independent, reason-based interactions of the public sphere, is a large part of why these mothers were able to effect change. The continuing existence of a private sphere, in which mothers, for a variety of cultural and biological reasons, continued to occupy unique subject positions, is the major reason that neither the governments of the United States nor Argentina was able to limit the power of these citizens.

¹²³ Max Weber defines “authority” as : “the right to make a particular decision and to command obedience” (1947).

¹²⁴ From Max Weber (cited in Rosaldo).

Paradoxically the position of the mother had been partially constructed by nationalist impulses that have viewed state power as enhanced by the confinement of motherhood to the private sphere. This theory also proved its weakness when the mothers used the very private nature of this subjectivity to justify their challenges to state hegemony. In the cases I reviewed here both states were surprised and alarmed by these challenges, demonstrating their limited understanding of the ways in which the power of the mother figure evolved and how her influence circulated. Some of this can be traced to patriarchal paradigms, which have traditionally defined power in terms of authority and dominance and neglected formulations based on emotion, community, and spiritual connection. These blind spots allowed both of these protest groups to grow in plain sight while their states either ignored them –believing that they could not marshal any meaningful power—or belittled them, for transgressing on public affairs. The latter move shows how the states, themselves, failed to understand the very nature of the private / public division --an unspoken agreement based on mutual respect for jurisdiction: the state stays out of the private sphere and mothers stay out of the public one. When the states violated these terms by invading the private sphere with impunity, the mothers reacted by invading the public one.

The first step the mothers took was to decry the state’s violation of the private sphere. Both mothers groups argued that the very core of the “private” had been destroyed by the state’s intrusion – on family life, on relationships with children, even on the physical space of the home in the Argentine case. The Argentine case is the most brutal with the dictatorship actually invading the home in many instances, and kidnapping, torturing and killing citizens who were deemed “subversive.” This

clearly violated the narrative of the benevolent patriarch watching over the national Catholic family, a paradigm that the Church, the military, and even the earlier nationalism of Perón had celebrated. The U.S. case was more nuanced in some ways but still a violation of the unwritten rules of the public/private divide. The U.S. government drafted young men into an undeclared war in Vietnam, misled Americans about casualty counts and combat success, and continued to commit troops to the conflict even after much of the nation had turned against the War.

ESSENTIALISM

Both groups of mothers based their moral authority on the private nature of motherhood. Without the private sphere mothers would not be privileged in a way that inspired respect for their voices. They would have none of the social capital that won them the attention of the media and other citizens, and the reluctant deference of the state, at least in front of the media. The fact that much of “mothering” takes place in the private space of the home and requires qualities such as nurturing, creativity, and patience --characterized as essential female traits for centuries-- is central to this formula. In the United States, the confinement of female activism to issues of moral reform, along with the privatizing influence of the Protestant church on the structure of the nuclear family enhanced the construction of mothers as private subjects. In Argentina, Catholic respect for *marianismo* and the cultural tradition of *machismo* combined to elevate the figure of the mother to a sacred role within the private sphere. Although mothers were considered closer to the spiritual realm and better at moral discernment than males, these facilities were limited to the private sphere.

Not by coincidence both of the groups established some of their authority on the basis of essentialist arguments. They built on their own states' images of traditional motherhood, performing the subjectivities that the states had designed. AMP cloaked their rebellion in domesticity, femininity and patriotism, eschewing second wave feminism. The early Argentine *Madres* presented themselves as humble, prayerful, and obedient to authority. They also dismissed feminism or the questioning of traditional gender roles.

Essentialist framings were also used by patriarchal forces such as the state, the church, and the media, to try to control the mothers' activities. The Argentine example was explicit with the dictatorship's heavy-handed propaganda campaign towards mothers. It included spots like the weeping testimony from a neglectful "mother" whose son had joined a guerilla group and been killed. The U.S. case was more subtle, rooted in white middle class cultural formations of mothers and women: President Johnson directly addresses mothers in a gentle if paternalistic tone in the 1965 documentary "Why Vietnam." While more nuanced, the U.S. approach was not necessarily less influential. In some ways the U.S. version could have been more difficult to challenge, being more deeply embedded in broad, seemingly benevolent constructs such as "tradition" or "culture." In both of these cases essentializing by patriarchal powers disguised political agendas that sought to disempower the mothers politically and make them more compliant with state missions.

The way in which essentialism can become proscriptive in the hands of patriarchal forces is vividly revealed in these two cases. The Argentine dictatorship promoted a very specific version of motherhood, one that supported nationalism and

obedience to patriarchy in the home and under the state. The patriarchal Catholic Church colluded, too, reminding mothers that prayerfulness –which was relatively more passive and certainly less public than street demonstrations—was the road to peace in the face of their personal losses. While Catholicism in the U.S. was not nearly as prominent, the history of Protestantism had reified patriarchal structures in the home and constructed mothers as private, domestic beings who, much like the Madres, deferred to patriarchal authority. In both cases patriarchy functioned as a machine that reproduced these narratives about the “nature” of mothers in diverse forms. Because of patriarchal monopolies over media and the economy such narratives became proscriptive rather than descriptive. These were ideals towards which the mothers were told they should strive, at times for religious and nationalist reasons, at other times for moral and social ends. In some instances, behaving as a proper mother was a mandate for survival on psychological and social levels. Mothers who did not fit this mold could be labeled bad mothers, “locas,” and hysterics. In the most extreme formulations they were going against nature or a God that had designed them in specific ways.

TESTIMONIALS

Testimonials are excellent texts through which to examine the complexities of the private/public divide, and so the majority of works that I examined fall into this category. Such accounts, which are frequently regarded as highly reliable by audiences, allow non-professional subjects to speak in private voices to public audiences. The power that the testimonial genre imparts to ordinary subjects mimics the private authority granted to activist mothers who speak in the public sphere. The

element of the private, whether in the production of a written account or the quality of a mother-child relationship, authorizes the speaker to convey her experience in a kind of protected sphere. The testimonial witness or the politicized mother, is not subject to the same standards that an explicitly political writer or a purely public subject would face. While this has proven advantageous to the politicized mother whose greatest strength is her private story, it does not mean that testimonials or documentaries are unquestionably reliable. My critical analysis of the *Madres'* sympathetic documentary, *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*, along with the juxtaposition of Peg Mullen's *Unfriendly Fire: A Mothers' Memoir* with C.D.B. Bryan's *Friendly Fire*, demonstrates this point. Mothers who claim to be apolitical can have hidden agendas, complex motives, and biases that may be beyond their own awareness. As Peg Mullen put it, "When you lose your son there is only one side" (*Friendly Fire*).

THE FAMILY AND THE STATE

Obviously both of these groups were born in reaction to what they saw as their states' misuse of authority. The women only moved into the public sphere because their private ones have been invaded. But once they had made this move mothers in both groups experienced transformations that profoundly changed their understandings of power on several levels. The *Madres* came to view the state-church collusion with new eyes, and to recognize the dynamics of patriarchy within the nuclear family. AMP'ers saw how entrenched patriarchal notions of formal politics were and just how marginalized women's voices remained in the public sector. Although neither group narrated these experiences as part of their primary

rhetorical campaign, my reading of numerous testimonials, along with personal interviews with the women, revealed that these discoveries fundamentally altered their relationships to the public/private divide and their notions of “family” in unexpected ways. The *Madres*’ experiences led them to expand their notions of family to include their ideological sympathizers. While they did not dismiss the benefits of the nuclear family, its very literal destruction by the state forced them to shore it up in ways that protected it from potential future attacks. For many of the *Madres* this has meant the creation of family that includes members who share their history –other *Madres*, as well as family members and friends of the *desaparecidos*. It has also meant the creation of a political legacy based on the memories of their lost children. The *Madres* claim to have inherited their political agenda –a broad-based social justice framework—from their missing children, with whom they experience an on-going spiritual connection, narrated in both private and public moments. This agenda is one that lives on in their descendents –a new generation of activist Argentines who are committed to carrying the *Madres*’ banner after their generation is gone, H.I.J.O.S. (Hijos por la identidad y la justicia contra el olvido y el silencio – Children for Identity and Justice, Against Forgetting and Silence). In a way the dictatorship’s brutal intrusion on the private, nuclear family ultimately transformed it into one that is more flexible, more united, and better equipped to withstand a future assault --against which some Argentine citizens remain guarded.

While U.S. mothers’ private conceptions of the nuclear family were not as revolutionized by the Vietnam experience as the *Madres*, they were certainly altered. We see in their testimonials that many AMP’ers who lost sons in Vietnam

experienced a similar expansion in the concept of family –they became as connected to their “ideological” families, as to their biological ones. The fiction I explore, however, suggests a reversion to the bonds of the nuclear family at least within sectors of the Leftist movement that had experimented with notions of more “public” family during the Vietnam era. When combined with the dissolution of AMP in 1986 the private structure of the nuclear family seems to have been less fundamentally altered than that of the Argentine case. The resurrection of AMP in 2003, however, has renewed an examination of the private/public nature of the nuclear family, particularly around the U.S. war in Iraq. Cindy Sheehan’s entrance into the debate has again problematized the terms of the public/private divide and resurrected the unresolved legacy of Vietnam.

The fact that both of these mothers’ groups eschewed feminism can be partially explained by their common desire to preserve the construction of the mother as a private identity. But their rejections of feminism stem from distinct cultural and historical circumstances. AMP’s distancing from feminism can best be explained as a desire to avoid association with second wave feminist activists for whom fundamental questions about gender role construction were primary. AMP’s primary motive was to end the Vietnam War and it did not want to alienate conservative mothers or distract from its stated purpose by identifying itself with feminist goals. In a similar way, the *Madres*’ intentional focus on their children would have been diluted, if not erased, by their association with more complex questions of gender role construction.

Comparison of testimonials from the two groups reveals that the *Madres*’ experiences of new gender consciousness, a byproduct of their protests, were more

dramatic than AMP'ers. As discussed in chapter one, this may reflect the interests of several non-Argentine editors and interlocutors who structured some of their more widely published testimonials --Bouvard, Bousquet, and Fisher, among them. In my own interviews with them, the impatience of several *Madres* towards questions about their feminism seems to suggest that feminism has been, for many of them, a topic that is frequently introduced by foreigners but that they themselves do not consider central to their experiences. At the same time the *Madres*' testimonials contain many dramatic narrations of their new understandings of how gender had limited their opportunities and experiences even before the dictatorship and their access to public, political voice during the regime. This paradox can possibly be explained by basic differences between first and third world feminism, and the tension created by the imposition of first-world agendas on third world subjects.

One notable pattern in both groups' attempts to make themselves authorities - -to claim "the right to make a particular decision and to command obedience"-- is the use of emotion.¹²⁵ In chapter one I discuss how the public sphere has long privileged reason as the hallmark of the political subject while emotion has marked those subjects who are incapable of sufficient reason (children, the mentally disabled, and in some eras, people of color and women). The fact that the mothers groups not only relied on emotion to justify their protests but actually celebrated it as a sign of their private connections to their children and thus their qualifications to speak in public is another example of how the women blurred the strict parameters of the public/private divide. The protests of both the groups are replete with examples of the women weeping, shouting, arguing with police, the army, and government officials. The early

¹²⁵ Max Weber

Madres begging journalists for help with their missing children – “Uds. son nuestra última esperanza, última esperanza!” (‘You are our last hope –our last hope!’) -- is some of the most poignant video of all. A 1973 photo of a U.S. mother wearing a sign inscribed, “My Son Died in Vain in Vietnam,” cannot help producing powerful emotions in the viewer. (Swerdlow *Women Strike*, 1993, 159). The testimonials of the two groups are filled with emotions they narrate around the hopes they had for their young children, the losses of these same children, and the solidarity they found with other mothers. The women portray themselves as subjects who are profoundly moved by emotion. But at the same time, they are rational as evidenced by their calculating strategies: the *Madres* used codes to tell other *Madres* where meetings were scheduled. They prayed in churches, passing notes as they recited the Hail Mary. AMP researched oil trade journals, wrote to the wives of Congressmen to influence their votes and contacted experts in economics and trade at prominent universities. They also published a regular newsletter that by 1970 had 400,000 subscribers. While these women were clearly affected by emotion, it did not diminish their capacities for reason. The women’s demonstration of emotion while still enacting powerfully rational strategies was another binary blurred in the private/public paradigm.

The private/public divide also frames my discussion of the role of essentialism in the protests of these two mothers groups. The dominant cultures in the U.S. and Argentina had for centuries promoted essentialisms that defined mothers in specific ways: nurturing, devoted, self-sacrificing, and obedient. The Argentine dictatorship, and to a lesser extent the U.S. government, continued to promote these portraits. Tacitly calling on the authority of the Church (God made mothers this way) or

Enlightenment thinkers (mothers behave this way *naturally* so it must be determined by some larger design), mothers were over-determined by these models. The ways in which essentialism was used in these two contexts was proscriptive. It was meant to control the behavior of mothers, in particular, to limit their activity in the public sphere. Whether intentional or not, this advanced the hegemony of patriarchal power. For this reason, and several others explored in chapter three, contemporary political organizers have been reluctant to organize women primarily on the basis of their identities as mothers. It reminds them too much of the proscriptive essentialism of earlier eras and the reduction of complex identities to dominant culture models. But these two mothers groups invoke essentialism in two ways that furthered their ability to influence public discourse to their advantage. First, they played into older versions of essentialist motherhood: yes, they were *mater dolorosas* ‘mourning mothers,’ solely devoted to their children, sacrificing themselves if necessary for their children’s safety and well-being. In the Argentine case this protected them somewhat from the worst violence of the dictatorship and allowed them to portray themselves as loyal to the program of Catholic nationalism. It also justified their protests: they were doing what any good mother would do if her entire identity were wrapped up in her mothering. In the U.S. case, AMP’ers emphasized the maternal nature of their protest, contrasting it with traditional patriarchal political models. Their voices were gentle, their goals were life-preserving, and their organization was relationship-based -- strategies that mothers would use with their children. Just like the *Madres*, the AMP protest grew directly out of their identities as mothers, which were, by implication, designed by some larger authority such as God or nature.

Within this context, both groups came to value their own direct knowledge of motherhood, and their relationships with other mothers, as powerful epistemological tools. They created what I have called an “experiential essentialism.” This model of essentialism goes beyond proscriptive, biological and even strategic essentialism. It combines the critical power of agency (feminism) with the experiences of the subject as a social being (poststructuralism), and the strengths of strategic identity politics (based on experience, not biology). Proscriptive essentialism has been traditionally used to limit subjects within a particular category. It assumes that the subject has little agency and is merely the product of discourse and ideology. It has been primarily a tool of those with formal authority. Biological essentialism, while celebrated by U.S. cultural feminism and *Peronismo*'s claim that mothers played a special role in the Argentine nation, also has its limitations. It tends to unproblematically attribute behavior patterns to biology. It is vulnerable to abuse since subjects are identified and categorized on the basis of physical attributes. While both groups of mothers at times authorized themselves through biological essentialism --their physical links to their children through childbirth and breastfeeding, for example—they recognized that biology is closely linked to several binaries that exclude women from public, rational discourse. To account for this, each group simultaneously narrated and performed roles that took them out of the realm of biology: letters of protest that were reason-based and appropriately hierarchical; appeals to the *junta* and the U.S. Congress that respected formal authority and standard political process. In the same vein, Susan Stanford Freidman's notion of strategic essentialism accurately describes some of the mothers' approaches: using essentialism selectively to identify shared identity

components but rejecting the totalizing narrative of traditional essentialism. This compromise joins some of the strengths of poststructuralist thinking –recognizing the multiplicity of identity categories—with those of feminist theory –preserving the agency of the subject in the face of multiple discursive influences.

These distinct forms of essentialism map an important evolution in the paradigm: from one that posits a homogenous subject determined entirely by the body (biological essentialism); to one based on the passive subject determined by multiple discursive framings (proscriptive essentialism); to one that recognizes the multiplicity of contemporary identity categories (strategic essentialism); and finally to one that recognizes the transformative nature of experience and the imperfect survival of agency in the subject (experiential essentialism). Experiential essentialism is the final step in this progression, theorizing several phenomena experienced by the two political mothers' groups in this study: how the mothers in these two groups were transformed by the practice of mothering, by their unique experiences of loss and rebirth, and by their treatment in their cultures as mothers. Sara Ruddick's description of "maternal thinking" helps to explain part of the first phenomenon by denaturalizing motherhood and explaining its commonalities in terms of practice. Mothers often seem similar because their individual practices of motherhood have taught them common skills: patience, flexibility, nurturing and reading emotions.¹²⁶ They were not born mothers, as so many have related in their testimonies, but *became* mothers through the practice of mothering. Consequently the mothers describe their kinship with other mothers on the basis of their shared experiences, not on shared biology. This is a perspective that patriarchal powers have missed in their attempts to

¹²⁶ These were practices that they would eventually carry into the public, political realm.

proscribe roles for mothers based on their innate qualities –the same qualities that mothers describe as learned. The traditional construction of motherhood as a “natural” identity for women is rejected in the women’s testimonial narratives, which describe their ambivalence towards their children.

While the mothers share what Ruddick has described as a disciplinary practice, their common experiences also bonded them in several unique ways. Their reliance on each other psychologically and emotionally –richly narrated in their testimonials—represents a component neglected by Foucault in his analysis of subjectivation: the process by which subjects come to occupy a discursive position of “truth.” While his outline of this process is useful, it is limited by his conception of patriarchal framings of the subject as primarily rational and fundamentally independent from other subjects. While the mothers in both these groups certainly underwent a process of “making the truth [their] own, becoming the subject of the enunciation of true discourse,” they did so in a community that valued emotion as well as reason (333).

The women’s treatment as mothers in their respective societies --stereotyped in certain restrictive formulations of the mother-- was another experience that created a shared component of “identity.” The very fact of their treatment as mothers gave them another shared identity experience that contributed to their experience-based “essence.”

Although “essence” has been historically defined as emitting from the subject in some “natural” way, theories of subjectivity, as proposed by poststructuralists and feminists, emphasize that the influences of discourse and ideology on the subject can

be equally transformative. The testimonials I explore in this project suggest that certain experiences are so transformative that they change a subject's way of being in the world—in a sense creating an essence that is recognizable in subjects who have undergone similar transformations. Testimonial theory supports this dynamic with its attention to the agency created through narration and the solidarity of witnessing in a community. More importantly, for theories of contemporary identity politics, the basis for these women's bonds was an "essence" based on experiences. Their spiritual rebirths in their children's political legacies, their on-going supernatural experiences of their children's presences, and their experience of a fundamentally collective subjectivity are elements that can only be explained with reference to an essence of experience.

Since the mothers in both groups blurred so many boundaries that had been strictly divided -- private and public, emotion and reason, authority and power, essentialism and constructionism-- it is no surprise that the most common reaction to them was ambivalence. A large portion of the texts produced about the *Madres* and AMP reveal a profound ambivalence about the groups and their activism. The films about the Argentine women reproduce this ambivalence in vivid characters who interact with the women: women who did not lose children (*La amiga*), families who naively or knowingly adopted the children of the *desaparecidos* (*La historia oficial* and *Cautiva*) and even close friends who feared for their own safety (*Imagining Argentina*). Newspaper coverage of the *Madres* up to the present captures the contradictory feelings that Argentine citizens have about these women and their continued activism.

Witnesses to AMP's protests expressed similar ambivalence. The activist mother figure in *A Walking Fire* is shunned by her brothers and father for twenty years for her stance against Vietnam, only to be called back to meditate between her father and brothers. The only mother in *Vida* is driven out of a group that is unable to reconcile her motherhood and activism. Audiences to Peg Mullen's activism are highly conflicted as they navigate her grief, anger and persistence in demanding answers to her son's death. Newspaper and magazine articles on the group persevere on the contradictions they embody, trying to make sense of them for anxious readers.

In the end the political mother continues to be a contradiction for many. She is positioned at the crossroads of several binaries upon which gender relations and political power have been structured: the public and the private, emotion and reason, the family and the state. Because most political mothers occupy both parts of each binary at some point in their activism, all three of these dyads are destabilized by their activism. In the two cases I explore in the U.S. and Argentina this has implications in several important realms. For the state, which depends on the stability of the patriarchal family unit for its citizens' allegiance, the political mother can be perceived as an unsettling presence –as in the democratic U.S. case—or a more serious threat –as in the authoritarian Argentine case. At the same time mothers can be valuable assets to their states, dedicating their energies to state-sponsored projects and shaping their children to privilege national identity above other allegiances. In the U.S. the American Gold Star Mothers have done this for years, as did the Women's

Section of the Navy League, and the mothers of the *Partido Peronista Femenino* in Argentina.

Political mothers can also be destabilizing to religious institutions, particularly those that have inscribed mothers in traditionally self-sacrificing, obedient roles. The Catholic Church in Argentina was markedly disturbed by the behavior of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*. The women's manipulation of the image and meanings of *la Virgen María*—sometimes emulating her ideal, sometimes defying it, other times re-defining it—was a constant source of tension for the highly politicized Argentine Catholic Church. The *Madres'* activities challenged the Church's ability to consistently maintain Catholic subject positions that reified the military regime's hegemony. Although AMP's dynamics did not appear to be formally influenced by any religious institution during their protests, the impact of the Protestantism on the patriarchal character of the U.S. nuclear family became clearer as gender conflicts within the family arose around the political mother in the Vietnam era. These tensions, while appearing to be about gender roles—in *Vida* and *A Walking Fire*, for example-- disguised deeper rivalries between the family and state for the allegiance of their members.

In post-structuralist theory it is bodies such as the state, the family and the Church that have traditionally created the maternal subject positions into which women are fitted. Discourse and ideology are powerful determinants of the “nature” of motherhood, which is deeply embedded in social relations. The political protests of these two mothers' groups had a surprising effect on these giants of post-structural theory. From their personal experiences of mothering they drew on strengths that

patriarchal forces had not mapped on to their paradigms of motherhood: persistence, creativity, courage, and community. Using these capacities –arguably honed through the practice of mothering—they destabilized the very giants who had sought to proscribe their motherhood: the state, the church, and the patriarchal family. While they often performed traditional essentialisms around motherhood, it was done in a strategic way. But they also discovered that their experiences bonded them to other mothers and enabled them to create a collective political identity with more power than their separate voices. Feminist theory would say that they had become “agents.” Testimonial theory would argue that they had transformed their subjectivities. Foucault would say they had subjectified themselves. The mothers themselves would probably eschew theory but acknowledge that something extraordinary happened in their respective protests. In the simple words of one *Madre de la Plaza de Mayo*: “The fact that such a tragedy did not paralyze us, but on the contrary, stimulated us, is amazing. It gave us strength to set out on a path that we never thought we were going to take”(Maroni qtd. in Mellibovsky, 77-78).

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