

THE EVOLUTION OF A SOCIAL MOVEMENT: A STUDY OF THE MADRES
DE PLAZA DE MAYO

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ABSTRACT

GRACE ANNE MONTGOMERY BOYD: The Evolution of a Social Movement: A Study of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo
(Under the direction of Greg Love)

This thesis investigates the evolution of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo social movement in Argentina from 1979-2014. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo are a social movement that initiated protests against the military junta that controlled Argentina from 1976-1982. The Madres were the mothers of people the junta had “disappeared” during its regime, and the protests were a demand for information about the missing children. After the fall of the dictatorship, the movement continued its protest for information. During this time, the movement underwent a structural split that coincided with ideological structure. I analyzed both internal and external factors to understand their role in the changing structure and ideology of the movement. I used an historical comparison to evaluate the evolution of the movement over time. I found that the strong collective identity was very important to the Madres continued existence. I also found that the Madres overcame the “free-rider” problem of collective action through the use of selective incentives as well as pursuing a mission of social justice. The Madres’ recent alliance with the Kirchner administration has compromised some of their credibility with the Argentine population. New legal proceedings to prosecute those responsible for the crimes as well as locate the missing grandchildren could have an effect on the future structure of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

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Introduction

I visited the Plaza de Mayo on a Thursday afternoon in May 2013 to experience the famous Madres march in protest in front of the Casa Rosada. I knew the Madres from old documentaries seen and discussed in Spanish history class. Heroes of human rights in Argentina, these women had opposed the military junta when no one else had. A small crowd of other tourists and I waited in the plaza for the Madres who finally pulled up in an old van. These tiny old women still wear the distinctive white headscarves that are now a familiar image permanently painted on numerous plaza floors across Argentina. The simple tied scarves representing motherhood are a sober reminder of these mothers' losses. I expected one group, so two groups marching perplexed me. One very small group holding a few posters of the black and white faces belonging to the desaparecidos marched silently and remained apart from the other larger group. The ten women of the larger group spread out and started to sing and march holding a banner saying "Hasta la victoria siempre queridos hijos" in front of them. The crowd joined in the song and marched behind them making a slow circle around the center of the plaza. Native Argentines walked through the plaza and largely ignored the spectacle. When I asked the tour guide about the Madres, she brushed off my inquiry and told me that the Madres were just troublemakers. She portrayed the women as too power hungry and too friendly with Cristina Kirchner. Her pejorative tone astounded me. I envisioned these women as revered heroes in Argentina. I realized that the Madres of the time of the Junta must not be the same Madres of today. I questioned and wanted to elucidate what had happened to change the organization from such a revered human rights movement

into an organization considered annoying and power hungry. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo still had a significant role in Argentine society, but they must have undergone some fundamental changes over time.

Historical Overview of Organization

The coup that overthrew President Isabel Perón on March 24, 1976, occurred during a tense political and economic period in Argentina. The turmoil of the previous years generated out of political instability and an economic downturn had yielded several guerrilla groups in the early 1970s, including the well-known Montoneros (MPM) and the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP). General Peron, the populist leader of Argentina, had encouraged popular mobilization and it was an effective tool for the class-conscious younger generation. The ERP was the military branch of the Workers Revolutionary Party (PRT), and the Marxist guerrilla movement conducted armed attacks against the government. The Montoneros were a paramilitary organization born out of the Peronist left. The two revolutionary organizations shared a common enemy in imperialism and capitalism, seen as the causes of Argentina's economic dependence on the world. Both groups saw guerrilla warfare as a means of upsetting the class inequality. The conservative and anti-communist military branded the leftist groups as domestic terrorists.¹

Isabel Perón served as vice-president during her husband Juan Perón's third term as president from 1973-1974 and became the first female president of the nation at his death. Isabel Perón worked as a nightclub dancer before her marriage to the older General Perón, and her lack of political training left her ill-equipped to deal

¹ Koonins, Kees. *Societies of Fear: The Legacy of Civil War, Violence and Terror in Latin America*, 128

with the violence breaking out between the right-wing paramilitary force known as the Argentine Anticommunist Alliance (AAA) and leftist guerilla groups like the Montoneros². The domestic battle between the left and right reflected the global political environment of the Cold War. Many countries in Latin America were internally split between the left and right. This divide had already led to coups in Uruguay and Chile in 1973, and Bolivia and Peru were still battlegrounds of political unrest. The Marxist-Leninist revolution pushed for by a young Argentine medical student, Ernesto “Che” Guevara, a decade earlier was still alive and supported by many Latin Americans.

The perceived communist threat to the government from the leftist guerilla groups caused the Armed Forces to force Isabel Perón to pass the Anti-Terrorism Act in 1974, which would be the first of several acts that would take away Argentine citizens’ constitutional rights in the name of fighting terrorists³. The law was similar to those passed earlier in Chile and Uruguay leading up to their military coups. The law also gave almost unchecked power to the military under the guise of protecting the nation from terrorists. Even before the coup, Isabel Peron had passed almost complete power into the hands of the military.

In a further attempt to restore stability to the state, the military organized the coup. The intent of the takeover was to “protect” the state from the terrorist threat of the Montoneros and other leftist groups. After the coup, the armed forces initiated their “Process of National Reorganization.” The plan intended to promote economic

² Romero, Luis Alberto. *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*. University Park, Pa. : Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002.

³ Pion-Berlin, David. *Through Corridors of Power: Institutions and Civil-Military Relations in Argentina*. University Park, PN: Pennsylvania State UP, 1997.

development in Argentina and “eradicate subversion” through the elimination of the guerilla groups and their supporters⁴. The end goal was to restore the values of the state under a conservative national identity. Despite the fact that the majority of leftist groups like the Montoneros were already defeated by the time of the takeover, the military proceeded to round up any subversives that could oppose the new regime.

The list of “subversives” covered a wide range of people that included reform-minded Jews and Catholics, communists, Peronists, and anyone who did not support the military coup. As part of the National Reorganization Process, thousands of people were “disappeared” off the streets. The labeling and persecution of leftists as “subversives” was not singular to Argentina, but a common practice in internal conflicts during the Cold War. Right wing death squads organized by the government kidnapped between 30,000-45,000 people during the dictatorship⁵. Military squads were dispatched to the streets to violently kidnap people and then hide them at holding facilities across the nation. Forty-five percent of the reported disappearances took place during the first year of the military crackdown against the guerilla forces. The so called *desaparecidos* came from all backgrounds including blue collar workers, lawyers, and students⁶. The majority of the disappeared were between the ages of twenty and thirty, and their families were left with no information regarding their fate. Years after the junta, reports would reveal that the disappeared were taken to hidden prisons, and the majority never made it out. The prisoners were tortured for

⁴ Eckstein, Susan. *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2001), 242..

⁵ Koepsel, Rachel. "Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo: First Responders to Human Rights." working paper., University of Colorado, 2011.
<https://www.du.edu/korbel/criic/humanitarianbriefs/rachelkoepsel.pdf>.

⁶ Koepsel. "Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo: First Responders to Human Rights.".

information about other subversives until they were killed. The reports indicated that one of the most common ways to kill the prisoners was to drug them and drop them into the ocean from airplanes, but all of this was unknown during the junta's rule. The uncertainty over the thousands of desaparecidos led to the first protest in the Plaza de Mayo in 1977.

On April 20, 1977, the mothers of desaparecidos made their first march in the Plaza de Mayo in front of the presidential palace known as the Casa Rosada. To circumvent the laws against gatherings of three or more people, the mothers took to marching in groups of two or three⁷. They marched to demand the whereabouts of their missing children. The group, composed mostly of middle-aged women, had met at various government agencies requesting information about their missing family members and decided to take on more drastic action to demand answers about their children⁸. Their status as mothers initially offered the group some protection against the government who tried to combat the Plaza de Mayo movement by labeling the mothers as "locas" or crazies. However, as the protest movement gained recognition both in Argentina and internationally, three of the original leaders of the Plaza de Mayo movement were disappeared themselves⁹. Despite the threat of punishment, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo continued to march every Thursday demanding answers from the government.

⁷ Eckstein, *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*, 244.

⁸ Borlamd, Elizabeth. *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo en la era neoliberal: ampliando objetivos para unir el pasado, el presente y el futuro*. colomb.int. [online]. 2006, n.63 [cited 2013-09-17], pp. 128-147 .56122006000100007&lng=en&nrm=iso>.

⁹ Bouvard, Marguerite Guzman. *Revolutionizing Motherhood : The Mothers of the Plaza De Mayo*. Wilmington, Del: Scholarly Resources Inc, 1994. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost : 76-78

The Madres movement outlasted the military dictatorship. The junta gave way to democracy in 1983, and the Madres marched on. The whereabouts of the desaparecidos remained unknown even as democratic elections resumed in the country. The Madres continued to demand information and justice for the violations of human rights conducted throughout the Dirty War. Many of the eventual changes in the group's identity were results from the fracturing of the original Plaza de Mayo movement. The radicalization of the mothers' goals and their attitude toward the post-dictatorship trials created strains within the movement. In 1986, a dozen mothers split and formed the Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora (Founding Line)¹⁰. As the name reflected, this branch included several founding mothers who disagreed with leader Hebe Bonafini's combative style. The other faction retained the name of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Both organizations remained important to social movements in Argentina despite the conflict between the two organizations. The two groups are both organizationally and ideologically distinct. The Founding Line is non-hierarchical and attempts to work with the government to find answers about the particular cause of death of each missing person. In contrast, the Asociación is hierarchical and focuses more on making sure that offenders from the Dirty War are punished while preserving the cultural memory of the conflict¹¹. The group also identifies themselves with the politics of their missing children and calls for a socialist revolution in Argentina¹². Hebe de Bonafini continues to be the group's leader, and her most radical actions include defending the terrorists responsible for the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001.

¹⁰ Bouvard. *Revolutionizing Motherhood* :162.

¹¹ Koepsel. "Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo: First Responders to Human Rights."

¹² Bouvard. *Revolutionizing Motherhood*. 17-19.

Another branch of the Plaza de Mayo movement was established in 1977. The group, the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, were grandmothers with the specific goal to fight for the return of their grandchildren (the children of their children who were disappeared by the government). They pursue their goals through investigations of birth certificates as well as publications of announcements in newspapers and distributions of posters with details of their missing children¹³. The Abuelas work closely with the Founding Line as both work toward the same goal of discovering the identities of the disappeared. The Abuelas remain a strong group and have located approximately 107 of the missing grandchildren.

Along with the issues of the Dirty War, the movement has been involved in the passing of several laws as well. For example, they campaigned for the incorporation of DNA testing of possible missing children into the Argentine Constitution in 2009. The group also organized a petition in 1992 that resulted in the creation of CONADI (Comisión Nacional por el Derecho de Identidad) that was designed to assist young adults who doubt their identities by referring them to blood analysis conducted by the National Bank of Genetic Data. All three groups continue as active movements within Argentine society and are major political forces today. The Abuelas were the driving force behind a powerful DNA law; the Association is a powerful voice of the Argentine left; and all three branch leaders have meetings with the executive leader of Argentina. The voices of the Madres shape the current political agenda of Argentina.

¹³ Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, "Historia de Abuelas." Accessed September 17, 2013. http://www.abuelas.org.ar/institucional.php?institucional=historia.htm&der1=der1_hist.php&der2=der2_inst.php.

Research Question

The women who first joined together in a march in front of the Casa Rosada demanded information regarding the whereabouts of their missing children during a time of social repression. The group still exists in Argentina today as a social movement, but with different political goals. The structure and ideology of the group has changed just as the culture and politics of Argentina have undergone change in the last forty years. Through a combination of sociological and political factors, the Plaza de Mayo movement has become one of the longest-lasting social movements.

The Plaza de Mayo movement is not unusual; it was a part of a number of social movements during the same time period in Latin America, but few other groups remain as relevant or have received such international recognition. This project attempts to describe what factors caused the evolution and the fractures in the Plaza de Mayo movement as well as to understand the group's role in the broader concept of social movements. Key questions to be answered include: Why and how does this group still exist 35 years after the return of democracy and the end of the forced disappearances? What explains the survival of a group founded for such personal reasons even after many of the original leaders have passed away? Why and how did the movement splinter and how are all three factions of the group still relevant today? How will the organization continue to change in the future? I will need to examine the changes in the political role of the organization from its conception to the present along with the group's changes in ideology, purpose, and structure and organization.

Studying the Madres not only provides insight on their role in Argentina's history, but also helps us understand the role of other social movements in general. The Plaza de Mayo group is not unique as a social movement protesting against a state power. In the second half of the 20th century, numerous peaceful political protest movements emerged across the globe. Many were successful like the Civil Rights Movement in the United States in the 1960s and the pro-democracy movements of Soviet Bloc nations in the 1980s¹⁴. Clearly, social movements can be a powerful force in politics and set a course for a nation's future trajectory. By studying the success of other movements as well as looking at the movements that failed achieve their goals; we can better understand the Madres and what factors led to their success. Comparing the Madres to other social movements enables us to see common traits in successful social movements as well as provide insight into what makes the Madres group unique. In my last section, I will produce a similar product to a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) in order to examine the future projection of the Madres in Argentina. Using open source information from previous sections of this paper, I will apply an analysis of competing hypotheses, an analytic technique set forth in *Structured Analytic Techniques for Intelligence Analysis* by Richard Heuer and Randolph Pherson. This section will attempt to answer the identity of the Madres in the future.

¹⁴ McCarthy, John D. and Mayer N. Zaid. "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory". *American Journal of Sociology*, 1977, 82, 6, 1212-1241, The University of Chicago Press. Web.

Theory of Group Formation

Before social movements can gain power and affect change, they must mobilize public support. Many of the nations that hosted social movements in the 1970s operated under a state of political suppression. Those involved in social movements in such hostile climates faced discrimination, if not worse. Despite the threat of violent retaliation, social movements like the Madres in Argentina and many pro-democracy movements in Eastern Europe were still able to mobilize thousands of citizens into groups.

Henri Tajfel's research for his *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, hypothesizes that it is a human instinct to belong to groups, because groups provide us, as social beings, with an identity and a community.¹⁵ While Tajfel's group theory claims that people join groups because they possess an "instinct" that drives them to be a part of the herd, Mancur Olson's expands on this basic reasoning. Organizations form out of groups of people who share a similar interest with the purpose of working toward a common goal. The formation of an organized group capable of collective action enables the group to pursue its interests¹⁶. As a group, the members have options that they do not possess as individuals. The Plaza de Mayo movement and other protest groups served a purpose besides fulfilling an innate human desire to be part of a group. The collective action of the group was necessary to accomplish the group's goals. Throughout recorded history, humans have participated in collective

¹⁵ Tajfel, Henri. *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2010. Web. 56.

¹⁶ Olson, Mancur. *Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Vol. 124. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1971. Harvard Economic Studies. Web. 33.

movements as a means of accomplishing shared goals or in order to construct a social identity.¹⁷ Many of the protest movements for democracy under communism originated in labor unions, because the people there had common interests and a common goal; the same proves true for the Madres.

As part of Mancur Olson's theory, each member must receive a "selective incentive" for joining the group.¹⁸ In the Plaza de Mayo example, belonging to the group gave a woman a greater chance of finding information about her child. However, once the dictatorship fell and the truth about the missing children became public knowledge, this selective incentive disappeared. Contrary to Olson's theory, the group did not fade away after the loss of the selective incentives. The purpose of the group was motivated by social justice rather than solely a personal benefit. The motive is crucial, because it solves the "free-rider" problem of any group. Olson's theory has a "free-rider" problem, which is that people do not join a group because they are able to get the incentives without being a group member. Olson explains that groups with a social justice motive are able to avoid the free-rider problem and exist without selective benefits¹⁹. While the original interest of the group started at the personal level, it expanded to a demand for justice at the national level that gave the group a continuing purpose. The Madres gave the women of the movement an identity, a community, and a common purpose. Above all, the women shared a strong experience: they all had lost a child to the regime. The identity change is crucial for

¹⁷ Ehrenreich, Barbara. "Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy." *College quarterly* 9.4 (2006): 196.

¹⁸ Olson. *Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. 38.

¹⁹ Olson. *Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*.42.

transition, because the goal on the personal level could never be fully met. The desaparecidos were not coming back alive, but the goal of social justice could be fulfilled on a more general level. The Madres could look at all of Argentina as their children and continue to fight for their right to equality. In order to continue their purpose, the Madres would expand their identity from mothers of the disappeared to mothers of Argentina. The strong group identity and mission of social justice continued the existence of the Madres.

Power of Social Movements

Most of the social movements of the second half of the twentieth century were a response to the suppression of conventional politics by bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes, and the movements were expected to collapse with the return of democracy. The social movements filled the political “democratic deficit”²⁰. When other avenues of democratic expression were blocked, social movements filled the void to give voice to the people. Social movements mobilized to protest the denial of political or human rights. In the United States, African-Americans used social mobilization against the laws denying them a democratic vote just as Latin Americans and Eastern Europeans created social movements in opposition to government suppression. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo, as a social movement, acted in the political space left abandoned by political parties and other democratic institutions. The only way to voice opposition to the regime came from social movements, and the

²⁰ Stahler-Sholk, Richard, Harry E. Vanden and Glen David Kuecker. “Globalizing Resistance: The New Politics of Social Movements in Latin America”. *Latin American Perspectives*. Vol. 34, No. 2, *Globalizing Resistance: The New Politics of Social Movements in Latin America* (Mar. 2007). Published by: Sage Publications, Inc. 22.

Madres were powerful in Argentina because their status as mothers in a society that idealized motherhood largely protected them from violent conflict.

Scholars Stahler-Sholk, Vanden and Kuecker worked to classify the many social movements of Latin America. Their research found that many social movements that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s during periods of political repression were by nature apart from conventional political institutions and instead relied on the power of collective action and protest. The social movements of this time period are marked by three factors:

- 1) Their tendency to seek autonomy from conventional political institutions
- 2) Their attention to horizontal and participatory process in decision making
- 3) Their quest for solidarity derived from notions of social justice linked to share subjective identities²¹.

The Plaza de Mayo movement had these three characteristics. The goal of the movement sprang from the demand for social justice for their disappeared children. The Madres operated on a mostly horizontal level when making decisions for the group. Moreover, the Madres are a movement that challenged the junta and gave a voice to the disappeared and any other challenger to the junta, and they did it free of any political institutions. The Plaza de Mayo movement operated as a basic form of social movement unconnected to any party affiliation.

²¹ Stahler-Sholk, "Globalizing Resistance." 24.

The study of the Latin American social movements of the 1970s and 1980s started with Charles Tilly's basic definition of a social movement—"a sustained challenge to power holders in the name of a disadvantaged population living under the jurisdiction or influence of those power holders",²² and they also employed impolite or "contentious" tactics and organized challenges to old social values. As a social movement, the Plaza de Mayo women engaged in contentious politics defined by Tilly as "collective activity on the party of claimants relying at least in part on non-institutional forms of interaction with elites, opponents, or the state".²³ The Plaza de Mayo movement used its collective action in protests in an effort to obtain information from the state. Like the Civil Rights protests in the 1960s that involved bus protests and marches in the US capitol, the Madres used public protests in political space to challenge the junta. As Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King led thousands in a march up to the Lincoln Memorial, the Madres walked with their signs of their missing children in front of the Casa Rosada. The social movements reclaimed political space through contentious politics.

Contentious politics are also a mechanism for creating a collective identity, which is an essential part of group formation. Social movements often rely on contentious politics to challenge power holders. The Madres contentious politics—their interactions with the state in the plaza—became part of their group identity. Distinct symbols, hand gestures, or apparel could be used as tools for protest. Just as a raised fist was immediately recognized as a symbol of the Black Panther group in the

²² Tilly, Charles. "Social Movements and (all Sorts of) Other Political Interactions - Local, National, and International - Including Identities." *Theory and Society* 27.4, Special Issue on Interpreting Historical Change at the End of the Twentieth Century (1998): 453-80. Web.

²³ Tilly, "Social Movements," 472

United States during the 1960s, the Plaza de Mayo women created an identity which not only united their group but also came to symbolize civil protest. Crucial to the branding of the Madres was their white handkerchiefs worn over their heads that symbolized motherhood. The white pañuelos became identified so much with the protest that the women were often asked to remove them when entering public buildings even after 1986.²⁴ The weekly protest marches are still identified by the distinctive headwear of the group. The white handkerchiefs and slogans helped form the identity of the Plaza de Mayo movement.

The Madres use their white handkerchiefs for brand recognition in flyers and on plazas across Argentina to attract attention and draw potential new members to their cause. As the values and actions of the group changed over time, the characterization of this group identity changed, but it does still exist; and this characterization provides an identity to all involved with the movement, even those who joined the organization later in time. Recognition is given to the original members, but as time passes, the Madres recognize that a new generation will have to evolve for the movement to continue. In their marches, the original Madres from the time of the junta are the ones who lead the marches with other supporters falling in behind. Any person who supports their cause is welcome, but the Abuelas especially seek out young people who might be children of the disappeared. The group remains largely the older women of the original movement, but younger people of both genders are joining the group and changing its makeup. While the image of the ageing mother remains the representation of the group, the membership itself is more

²⁴ Bouvard. *Revolutionizing Motherhood*. 183.

diverse. The idea of collective identity and collective action has been posited as a reason for this continued involvement.²⁵

The Fight Continues

Despite general similarities in motivation and formation, social movements vary in longevity and effectiveness. When studying social movements, most scholars analyze a variety of factors: disruption vs. moderation, internal vs. external explanations, success vs. failure, and policy outcomes.²⁶ Previous literature categorizes social movements based on their tactics for initiating change, the direction of influence of the change, if the group is successful in bringing about change, and if so, to what extent. When studying social movements, it is important to study not only political effects but also social changes.

Under the theory of new social movements defined by Stahler-Scholck et. al., movements like the Madres should have disappeared after the return to democracy, as they were no longer needed to be the democratic voice of the suppressed. Many social movements fit this expectation, especially those whose goal was democratic freedom. For example, the group Solidarity in Poland was a social movement advocating democracy that began to function as a political party after the fall of communism. Four years later the group ceased to exist as a social movement or a political party because its role had been taken over by other political parties that better represented

²⁵ Polletta, Francesca, and James M. Jasper. "Collective Identity and Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 283-305. Web.

²⁶ Tilly, "Social Movements," 460.

the new interests of the general population.²⁷ The goals of the social movement were not longer relevant to society.

In contrast, some social movements remain active for many years like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) that was started in 1909 and still has a significant voice in American society. The NAACP has an active membership of around 42,000, because the group constantly renovates its specific goals while its overarching purpose remains the same and is general in nature²⁸. The specific demands of the NAACP have changed over the timeline of the fight for African-American civil rights. They have achieved some of their goals, like the right of African-Americans to vote, but they continue with their purpose of advocating for social justice for all Americans. The ability to adapt the goals of the movement to social and political change is shared by the Madres group and could explain the group's existence after the fulfillment of its originally stated goals. The Madres have expanded their goals from the original mission of finding their disappeared children into a fight for justice, not only for those involved in the crimes under the junta, but also for any marginalized sector of the Argentine population. Groups like the NAACP and collapsed movements like Solidarity can help illustrate the longevity of the Plaza de Mayo movement.

Evolution of the Madres

The next step is to analyze what and how this social movement has evolved.

My research looks at three events in the Madre's history that are expected to be

²⁷ Webb, Paul and Stephen White. 2007. *Party Politics in New Democracies*. New York: Oxford University Press.

²⁸ Marger, Martin N. "Social Movement Organizations and Response to Environmental Change: The NAACP", 1960-1973. *Social Problems*, 1984, 32,1, 16-30, University of California Press.

catalysts for change within the movement. The three events are notable parts of Argentina's recent history related to the goals or structure of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo organization. The first section will examine changes in the group during the transitional period from a dictatorship to a democracy. Did the movement adapt to its changing legitimacy and power along with its public perception as its enemies were pushed out of power? Did the group's protest remain relevant? How did the group not break apart? I look at the political and social problems and eventual changes during this time and compare the evolution of the Plaza de Mayo movement with these changes. The second section examines a significant event of the movement—its split into two branches in 1986—and tracks the socio-political environment of Argentina leading up to the event. The final section looks at more recent history, in particular, the passing of an Argentine law in 2009 that allows for compulsory blood testing in an effort to locate and identify grown children of the desaparecidos stolen during the dictatorship. I analyze the political setting that allowed for the approval of this law and the backlash against it and the group to understand the changes in the movement and the perception of its role in modern Argentina. Hopefully, the study of these three historical events alongside the changes in the Plaza de Mayo movement over time will reveal the forces that shaped the group into its current state. Once I have mapped out the catalysts for change in the Madres, the evolution of this social movement can be examined in comparison to other movements.

Transition from Junta to Democracy

The Plaza de Mayo movement and the entire nation of Argentina entered a period of transition with the end of the military junta. By the early 1980s, the junta was struggling with economic problems. Foreign debt increased from about US\$7 billion in 1976 to over US\$46 billion in 1983 at the conclusion of the dictatorship. The bulk of this indebtedness was contracted between 1978 and 1982.²⁹ The collapse of the country's financial institutions led to bankruptcies within domestic industries and the withdrawal of foreign businesses like General Motors from Argentina. Large scale unemployment led to labor unrest and strikes.³⁰ Tied to Argentina's economic problems was a turnover of dictators with General Roberto Viola replacing General Videla in March 1981. Videla's successor only lasted a few months before being replaced by General Galtieri in December of that same year.³¹ The US administration under President Jimmy Carter emphasized human rights and put pressure on the junta in Argentina while the Plaza de Mayo Movement had built a positive reputation for itself in Western Europe through global human rights groups like Amnesty International.

In an effort to maintain control and appease some public demands, the junta authorized the reactivation of political parties in December 1981³². In the absence of political parties, the Plaza de Mayo movement had stepped in and filled the role of connecting the government to the people. The Madres remained separate from any

²⁹ Teubal, Miguel. "Rise and Collapse of Neoliberalism in Argentina: The Role of Economic Groups." 175.

³⁰ Jelin, Elizabeth, ed. *Women and Social Change in Latin America*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1990.

³¹ Romero, Luis Alberto. *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*. University Park, Pa. : Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002.

³² Romero. *A History of Argentina*.

political party after the reactivation but continued their political role. The revived parties formed a collective association called the Multipartida. In a sign of a changing tone in the Plaza de Mayo movement, the group demanded attention as well as a seat at the Multipartida's first meeting³³. The women once cast off as "Las locas" were assertive and aggressive in their rights as part of this small step toward democracy. The junta's struggles opened up new institutions for the voices of the Plaza de Mayo. Once the Multipartida admitted the Madres to the meetings, the group insisted that the desaparecidos become a topic of the new group. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo were not a recognized political party, but they were more than a human rights group. They had become a recognized voice that held political weight.

The movement continued to undergo a change as they were pushed more into the spotlight with the further implosion of the junta. By 1982, the junta was nearing its end and initiated the Falklands Conflict with Great Britain over ownership of the Malvinas/Falklands islands in a last-ditch attempt to distract the public from the billions owed in foreign debt and to serve a rally-round-the-flag effect for the restless labor unions. The disastrous outcome of the Falklands Conflict broke the last tenuous hold of the junta's control. The junta was unable to withstand the blame for the military defeat coupled with the nation's economic collapse and increased international pressure brought on from their war with Britain. The junta resigned itself to defeat and scheduled elections for October 1983.³⁴

³³ Bouvard. *Revolutionizing Motherhood*.

³⁴ Jelin, Elizabeth, ed. *Women and Social Change in Latin America*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1990.

Recognition of the Madres

The Madres empowered other groups to form and speak out against human rights violations. The general population's disaffection for the junta provided their support to the Plaza de Mayo movement, which at this point, involved around 2,500 Madres from various chapters across the country³⁵. After the Falklands defeat, thousands of Argentines joined the Madres in a day long "March of Resistance" in the Plaza de Mayo on December 10, 1982³⁶. The country again rallied behind the human rights movement when the military released its "Documento final de la junta militar sobre la guerra contra la subversion y el terrorismo" (Final Document of the Military Junta on the War Against Subversion and Terrorism). The document outraged the Madres by claiming that the desaparecidos were dead or in exile and called for national reconciliation. The document represented one of the greatest fears of the Madres: the desaparecidos would be left for dead in history as the country moved forward without answering for the past. Instead of reconciliation, the document brought 30,000 protestors to march with the Madres in rejection of the Documento final³⁷. The junta's final act was an attempt to avoid prosecution for any acts committed during the Dirty War through Argentine Law NO. 22924, a self-amnesty law for the military against all crimes committed under junta rule. The junta recognized the very real risk of reprisals from a vengeful Argentine population.

³⁵ Bouvard. *Revolutionizing Motherhood*.

³⁶ Bosco, *The Madres de Plaza de Mayo*

³⁷ Femenía, Nora Amalia, and Colos Ariel Gil. "Argentina's Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo: The Mourning Process from Junta to Democracy." *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 1 (1987): 9-18.

With the return to democracy, the Madres continued to demand information regarding the desaparecidos. They faced the added problem that the military started to destroy files, and officers involved in the disappearances started fleeing the country as the military attempted to deny its misdeeds during the junta. The Madres possessed the ability to take a much more combative role against the military at this time, as they were legally able to expose the military with press conferences and written flyers and leaflets. The group was no longer disregarded as a group of crazy women bound to get themselves killed but were an institution separate from the political system that symbolized liberty against the old repression.

In the last days of the junta and the first part of the new democracy, the Plaza de Mayo movement stepped into the national and international spotlight and had to make adjustments for those changes. The group's hierarchical structure was important in maintaining order as the size of the organization expanded with the onset of democratic freedom. More women came forward to join their Madres and to add their children to the list of desaparecidos without fear of reprisals. The movement's selective benefit of information no longer came with the risk of retaliation. The threat of severe reprisals diminished as the junta weakened and with the gain of popular support, the movement became bolder in its requests and protests.³⁸ The language of their requests for information changed from a language of deep respect to a demand to have answers.³⁹ Despite the group's newfound confidence and public recognition, their requests for information were still denied.

³⁸ Foss, Karen, and Kathy L Domenici. "Haunting Argentina: Synecdoche in the Protests of the Mothers of the Plaza De Mayo." *The Quarterly journal of speech* 87.3 (2001): 237.

³⁹ Bouvard. Revolutionizing Motherhood.

Besides the selective benefits of the movement in the form of information and recognition, the Madres social movement fulfilled their need for an identity. The white headscarves branded the Madres as a specific community, and this community had power as a symbol within Argentina and abroad. The articles and protests of the Madres became part of their identity. To be a Madre had a clear meaning in Argentina: a Madre had lost a child to the military and was engaged in active protest to obtain information about her child. As the Madres became a more recognized and respected movement, their group identity solidified. Even after the fall of the junta, the movement gave identity and purpose to the women.

The Madres and President Alfonsín

When Raúl Alfonsín successfully ran a presidential campaign in the fall of 1983 with the support of his Radical Civic Union party⁴⁰, the role of the Plaza de Mayo movement continued its transition into an accepted and popular organization but did not reorient its goals. The Radical Civic Union party ran its campaign with an emphasis on the human rights violations of the junta. The Peronist candidate, Alfonsín's competition, played into the military's desire for national reconciliation in order for the nation to move forward without risk of further military intervention, but Alfonsín's party rejected any compromise that left the violations of human rights unpunished. Alfonsín's successful bid reflected the nation's desire for justice for the crimes of the military junta.

Within days of his election, Alfonsín announced the formation of a truth commission and the legal trials of the junta's leaders. He repealed the amnesty law

⁴⁰ Pion-Berlin, David. *Through Corridors of Power: Institutions and Civil-Military Relations in Argentina*. University Park, PN: Pennsylvania State UP, 1997. Print.

put in place by the junta. In 1983, he set up the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP). The organization's goal was to organize and manage all information regarding the reported desaparecidos. In essence, it was the first truth commission. CONADEP's findings published in a report called "Nunca más" would be major evidence in the prosecution of the junta⁴¹. For the first time, there was an institution supporting the Madres' work. At first glance, it appeared that the Madres' battle against the government and the state over justice for their children's suffering would end because there was a government in place that professed to support their goals. Instead of standing as the voice of government opposition, the Madres could align themselves with the new government.

Alfonsín had been democratically elected with the Madres present at his swearing in ceremony, but he was extremely sensitive when dealing with the military understanding his fragile position and the possibility of another military coup. Closer inspection shows that even from the beginning, the state was not looking to punish lower ranking offenders of the human rights violations and the measures taken to uncover and reveal the crimes were not largely successful. For example, CONADEP, the institution founded to uncover the fates of desaparecidos for family members, only received approximately 8,000 cases⁴². Many families continued to withhold information about the disappearances as they feared the consequences of reporting military crimes⁴³.

⁴¹ *Nunca Más: A Report by Argentina's Commission on Disappeared People*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1986.

⁴² Bosco. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

⁴³ Bosco, Fernando J. "The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Three Decades of Human Rights' Activism: Embeddedness, Emotions, and Social Movements." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96, no. 2 (2006): 342–365

The division between the Alfonsín government and the Madres came about as a result of the trials of the junta members. The decision to prosecute the regime leaders was an almost unprecedented choice. Greece in 1975 was the only other country that had put its own regime leaders on trial for massive human rights violations.⁴⁴ For many, the Argentine trials were an example for the other countries in Latin America who had thrown off similar regimes. Alfonsín accepted the risk of possible military retaliation and gave the trials to the civilian courts when the military refused to hear the case. He advocated on the side of the desaparecidos and the other victims of the Dirty War.

With the support of the Argentine population and human rights groups like the Madres, Julio Strassera and his assistant Luis Moreno Ocampo successfully prosecuted the leading members of the military governments that ruled Argentina during the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional for the crimes of mass violations of human rights. On December 9, 1985, General Jorge Rafael Videla and Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera received life sentences, General Roberto Eduardo Viola received 17 years in prison, Admiral Armando Lambruschini eight years, and Brigadier Agosti four and a half years⁴⁵. Estela Barnes de Carlotto, President of the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, provided witness testimony at the trials. The Madres were unsatisfied, as they considered the sentences too lenient. Moreover, none of the convicted admitted to nor supplied any information regarding their children's disappearances. The desaparecidos were not receiving justice, and they had never

⁴⁴ Jelin. *Women and Social Change in Latin America*.

⁴⁵ Jelin. *Women and Social Change in Latin America*

even received the fair legal trials that their tormentors received. The courts justified their leniency by spreading the blame to the whole military.

After the three junta leaders were convicted, lower ranking military men would be tried. However, facing threats from the military, Alfonsín pushed Congress to pass a law to limit the prosecution of military officers accused of human rights violations, like kidnapping, murder, and torture, during the military rule. During the debate over the new law, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo tossed leaflets from the gallery and shouted at the legislators before being expelled from Congress⁴⁶. The Ley de Punto Final (Full Stop Law, Argentina Law NO. 23492) was enacted in December 1986. It established a deadline in which charges regarding human rights violations had to be filed within 30 days⁴⁷. With the help of the Madres and other human rights groups, the prosecutors were able to process almost 400 cases before the deadline's expiration, which was almost 100 times the expected amount. Without the assistance of the human rights groups, that number of trials could not have been processed.⁴⁸

The Madres continued to protest the Ley de Obediencia Debida (Due Obedience Law, Argentine Law NO. 23521), which was a complement to the Full Stop Law⁴⁹. Under threat of a military takeover, Alfonsín and Congress had to pass a law which exempted all military except for the top tier from prosecution for human rights crimes during the Dirty War. The law was based on the assertion that the accused were only following orders. The law cut down the number of cases from

⁴⁶ Bosco, "The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Three Decades of Human Rights' Activism."

⁴⁷ Hayner, Priscilla B. *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

⁴⁸ Bonner, Michelle D., *Sustaining Human Rights: Women and Argentine Human Rights Organizations*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007.

⁴⁹ Jelin, *Women and Social Change in Latin America*.

around 450 to 50 and halted almost all trials. The Madres were active in the press and with flyers in their open opposition to the new laws, which basically shut down the prosecution of the military. Alfonsín was under tremendous pressure from the military to stop the prosecutions, but the halfway measure he enacted served to anger both the human rights groups and the military⁵⁰.

The division between the Madres and Alfonsín served to strengthen the overall identity of the Madres. Under the junta, part of their identity was their engagement in contentious politics against the government through the peaceful and public means available to them. The Madres' march in the plaza was their protest against the military's actions. When the new government failed to help them actually achieve their goals, the Madres were once again forced to depend only on themselves. It reinforced the attitude of us vs. them present within the group between them and the government. The use of contentious politics against the government would continue to define their movement. The division more clearly established a boundary between the movement and their goals and those of the government.

Although the Madres had moved out of a repressive state and into a new democracy, they remained opposed to the government. At the start of the democratic era, the Madres were riding waves of international success and recognition for their advocacy for human rights and their condemnation of the junta. As the economy suffered and workers began to strike, the Madres were a group that Argentine population could unite behind. The Madres protests despite the repressive gag on society had encouraged other groups to speak out against the junta's failings. The

⁵⁰ Brysk, Alison. *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994.

Madres enjoyed the success of being recognized and the power that came with it. However, the government's decisions to not fully prosecute the military for its crimes became a dividing wedge between the Madres and the new democratic government. The Madres continued to use their new legal means of protest to fight for the information and recognition denied their missing children. Argentina went through a major transition period, but like the Madres it was only somewhat changed. The nation threw off its military rule and embraced democracy, but it was a limited democracy where many people still lived under oppressive fear and there was the lingering threat of another coup. The Madres had been transformed in the public's eyes from "Las locas" to freedom fighters, but the group still remained the voice of government opposition on account of the halted military trials. Despite the halt in the government's human rights crimes, the Madres would not settle for their cause being left behind in history. The questions regarding their children's disappearances had to be answered whether the government supported their movement or not.

The Schism

The second major transition period for the Madres combined an ideological split with a physical division within the movement. In the aftermath of the halted military trials, tensions between the Madres and Alfonsín's new government ran high. The new democracy struggled to balance the pressure of the human rights groups with the threat of another coup from the military. Despite the movement's solidarity and support through the democracy's early days, the mothers involved began to disagree on the direction of the movement⁵¹. The internal division ultimately became irreconcilable and the Madres movement formally split into two factions in 1986: La asociación madres de Plaza de Mayo (Association) and La línea fundadora (Founding Line).

The Madres movement originated as a group with a common goal. Despite varying socioeconomic backgrounds, the members of the Madres were all mothers who had lost children to a corrupt government who were seeking answers. One of the unique characteristics of the Madres' group identity was the bond between members of a shared loss. Throughout its formative years, the Madres managed to brand themselves as a movement. As mentioned earlier in the overview of the group, the Madres created a tightly bonded group with the creation of a branded identity. The white headscarves became a well-known symbol⁵². The weekly protests were always organized in the same spot. Besides the physical branding that created a cohesive group, the Madres were an emotionally bound movement. The group was founded on the basis of one of the strongest emotional ties: a mother to her child. Each of the

⁵¹Bouvard, Margarite Guzman. *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*. 1994.

⁵²Bouvard. *Revolutionizing Motherhood*. 170.

mothers identified with one another over the loss of this innate bond because of the disappearance of a child. Under the dictatorship, there was a common enemy and a common goal for the group⁵³.

Moreover, there was only one means of obtaining their goal: protest against the dictatorship. The Madres had little room for disagreement over the handling of their group as there were so few options available to them. The Madres formed because of their limited political recourse. As stated, their goal was information about their missing children. The women chose the means of public protest to obtain their goal. When they exhausted any legal means, they switched to actions of contentious politics. The Madres chose public protest but refrained from violence. The Madres could have adopted violence as part of their identity, but they chose to use their power as victims, as mothers seeking their lost children, to accomplish their goal. Their decision to use protest without violence, attracted international attention and presented their complaints in favorable light. The Madres were a cohesive group, because they had a common and easily defined goal and only had each other to help accomplish it, because of the restrictions of the junta.

With the return of democracy, more legal actions of protest were available to Madres. They had the option of working with the government to obtain their goal or continuing their own fight. As the previous section outlines, the Alfonsín government initially tried to work hand in hand with the Madres but was unsuccessful owing to the necessity of appeasing the military as well. The laws halting the trials of military officials for the crimes committed during the Dirty War, including those committed

⁵³Peluffo, Ana. "The Boundaries of Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo." 2007.

against their children, were a deadly blow to the Madres. Their demands following the fall of the junta were centered on obtaining justice for their children, and the trials were the first legitimate opportunity to do this. When the immunity laws came into play, the Madres lost the opportunity for the state to censure the officials responsible for the disappeared. True justice for the human rights crimes would not come to pass. Alfonsín's decision made clear to some of the Madres members that the government was not on their side. The faction that supported a complete break off of the relationship with the government met resistance from other members who argued that the movement owed it to Argentina to work with the government toward a better future. This difference in opinion would become the most cited answer as the reason behind the movement's split.

The military trials were brought to an end in 1986. President Alfonsín was not a natural enemy of the Madres group. During his presidency, he cautiously broke down the military's power structure, and he backed the creation of the Madres' brainchild, CONADEP, to record human rights abuses⁵⁴. He also sponsored the trials of the junta leaders. Alfonsín was trying to lead a country just out of a bloody military dictatorship and burdened by severe economic issues. He was a democratic leader who opposed the human rights violations of the military, but he was faced with the possibility of another coup if he pursued justice against the military too strongly. Three different mutinies were attempted during his presidency. While an apparent believer in the cause of the Madres, Alfonsín had to push forward with the democratic changes he could make. He had to pick his battles and decide what was possible in

⁵⁴ Associated Foreign Press. "Argentina's post-dictatorship leader". 2009.

the first years of democracy. In the eyes of the Madres, his efforts were just not enough.

Immediately after the trials were halted and immunity passed, a faction of the Madres led by Hebe Bonafini called for a more radical approach within the movement. Instead of simply raising awareness and seeking justice for the missing children, Bonafini wanted the movement to align itself with many of its children's leftist ideals. Bonafini's faction of the Madres wanted to advocate for other social categories they saw as victims like the workers⁵⁵. During the junta, the Madres only goal had to be obtaining information about the missing people. With the knowledge of their children's fates, Bonafini and her followers were able to realize some of their other goals that had formed with the return to democracy. She still wanted justice for her children, but Bonafini thought taking up the work of her children was the best way to continue the fight. Bonafini's faction wanted to keep the desaparecidos alive, not through memorials, but alive as humans rather than bodies. Bonafini posited that continuing the socialist work of their children was the means for keeping the missing generation of Argentina alive.

Although the Madres were angered with the overall lack of punishment for the guilty, several military officials had come forward and confessed that the desaparecidos were dead. Members of the military admitted to killing the missing people based on their involvement in terrorist organizations. Although the Madres vehemently denied their children were terrorists, the truth regarding the fate of their children was known. The government brought in forensic experts to examine and identify the human remains found in Argentina supposedly belonging to the

⁵⁵Gorini, Ulises. *La rebelión de las madres. Historia de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. 2006.

desaparecidos. There would be no reunions between mothers and lost children; so a new question was put to the Madres⁵⁶. With the return of their children no longer an option, what would be their overarching goals? Would the ideological purpose or structure of the organization change? Would the organization carry on now that the children were no desaparecidos to find?

At a transition point, the Madres had to reorient their identity. Biologically, their children were dead, but the desaparecidos could remain alive as a point of relevancy in the political discourse. The continued lack of justice for the desaparecidos remained a point of interest to the country. The after effects of the Dirty War were present in society, as many military officials retained their positions in the new government. The Madres were faced with two options in dealing with the new regime. They could claim the bodies found and identified as their children by forensic specialists, accept compensation, and move on. In this option, the Madres were working with the government administration and the teams of specialists assigned to uncover the truth about the missing people. The group would not undergo a massive internal change. The women would gain the truth but support the democratic government in its efforts to move on past the dictatorship. The past would be put to rest, but the Madres would continue to seek justice.

The second option required them to reject the bodies found in order to make a political statement. They would keep the desaparecidos alive by refusing to accept their children as dead, and by doing so, keep the idea of bringing the military to justice prevalent in politics⁵⁷. Mercedes Mereno, a Madre, gave her opinion when

⁵⁶Taylor, Diana. "Making a Spectacle: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo."

⁵⁷Briggs, Elizabeth. "Beloved Elderly Women No More."

asked about claiming her daughter's body. She said, "If you saw that she was alive, I am asking for her alive, because if she isn't, I want to know who killed her and I want that assassin to be put in jail. If I ask for her as a corpse, then I am killing her, not the one who assassinated her."⁵⁸ The second option carried the Madres beyond the deaths of their children. While technically a decision to not let go of the past, was actually the more radical choice. In this option, the desaparecidos were still the Madres biological children but, even more importantly, they were a political platform. The Mothers refused to admit their children were dead, because the declaration usually meant no investigation. If all of the missing were declared dead, it gave the government the opportunity to close the cases on the disappearances without ever actually investigating the cases. The second option refused to move into the future without atonement for the past. The split occurred because of the divided opinion of the Madres. Some of the women were willing to accept the government's recompense for their children and bury the dead, and some of the women were unwilling to do this. Both groups desired justice, but some of them refused to let the desaparecidos be declared dead as they feared this would prevent justice from ever being served.

Alfonsín's administration passed Laws NO. 22.068 and 22.062 in August 1979 in an effort to stop the Madres from pressing so many cases against the military. The laws determined anyone who had disappeared between 1974 and 1979 could be declared dead and government compensation would be given⁵⁹. The Madres were under tremendous pressure from the government to accept the exhumations of the bodies of their children. When the group resisted the government's and media's

⁵⁸ Bouvard *Revolutionizing Motherhood* 139.

⁵⁹ Bouvard. *Revolutionizing Motherhood*. 139.

persuasive efforts to accept the exhumations, the government decided to go ahead and exhume the bodies anyway and use the press to reveal the findings. The Madres heard that the first of the exhumations was to take place on March 3, 1985 in the town of Mar del Plata, so a contingent of Madres journeyed to the town to circle the graves and prevent an exhumation. The Madres with familial ties to the supposed corpses filed legal requests to keep the government away, but Hebe Bonafini, an outspoken leader who had lost two sons to the junta, was arrested for her protest. The judge eventually ruled in favor of the Madres, and they won their first victory against the government's attempt to bury the past⁶⁰.

Because of their disagreement with Alfonsín's administration over the trials, the exhumation of corpses, and the need for national reconciliation, the ideology and political strategy of the Madres evolved. Besides demanding information about their children, they began to openly criticize the government. They viewed their right to dissent as a crucial part of democracy, and they and other human rights group were important in bringing about its return. The group argued, "We respect the government but we won't shut up."⁶¹ They protested the political promotion of former military members involved with the Dirty War. The Madres also began lobbying for a more equitable economic distribution. The Madres founding of their own newspaper in 1984 provided them with an instrument to debate the government. Their pushes against the Alfonsín administration prompted a government backlash against them in an attempt to destroy their image in the eyes of the Argentine populace. The government used its power over large daily papers to malign the organization and

⁶⁰Bouvard. *Revolutionizing Motherhood*. 151.

⁶¹Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*. 151.

often portrayed the Madres as grieving women being controlled by leftist forces. A highlight in the rift between the presidential administration and the Madres occurred in June 1985 when Alfonsín denied an audience to the Madres despite having already made an appointment to meet with them. The Madres responded by refusing to leave the presidential palace until an audience was granted, proving once again that the government did not control them⁶². However, the tension between the government and Madres created cracks within the organization that could not be mended.

The members of the Madres were pulled in both directions. Both groups were determined to seek justice for their children, but the manner in which to proceed was less clear. Some women wanted to work with the government and its organizations to identify the bodies of the desaparecidos and to continue to raise awareness for the human rights violations of the Dirty War. Others refused to cooperate with government institutions and wanted to continue to seek justice outside of its purview by working for the rights of other interest groups, specifically those with leftist ties. The inability to decide on a single course of action prompted the split into the two groups in 1986. At the time of the organization's presidential election, the Madres were so undecided about their future course of action that an outside lawyer was called in to arbitrate the proceedings. The members were unable to agree, and the divide became permanent. The group that would call itself La asociación de Madres de Plaza de Mayo (La Asociación) opted for the more radical course for the future. Hebe Bonafini became the leader of this faction. The second group, the Founding Line, chose its name from the 14 original members of the Madres who chose to form

⁶²Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*. 172.

this faction, and this group was led by Renee Epelbaum⁶³. Both groups retained an ample number of followers and continued with their activism according to their separate choices. The Founding Line continued to work for justice for the perpetrators of the crimes of the Dirty War along with the identification of children, and the Association's goals included upholding the work of their disappeared children as a socialist movement.

After the split, the two factions began to look very different. Besides the differences in ideology between the two groups, the members of the Founding Line were more likely to be from the middle and upper classes than the women of the Association⁶⁴. The members of Founding Line allowed their members to accept government compensation for their lost children. They supported the exhumation of the bodies found in secret graves and worked with the original mandate of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. They disagreed with Hebe Bonafini's leadership and denial of the exhumations. The Founding Line entered into a period of mourning for their children as they accepted them as dead. Although still protesting for answers and justice for the dead, they worked with government agencies to meet their goals⁶⁵. The group also remained more aligned with the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo whose focus also remained identifying and seeking justice for the victims. The Abuelas continued to search for the children they believed born to imprisoned desaparecidos and given to military families.

On the other hand, the Association expanded the mandate of the original movement. Bonafini's faction refused the exhumation of bodies, even going so far as

⁶³Taylor, Diana. "Making a Spectacle: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo."

⁶⁴Peluffo, Ana. "The Boundaries of Sisterhood".

⁶⁵Kelly, Annie. "Scandal Hits Argentina's Mothers of the Disappeared

to surround gravesites to prevent forensic scientists from exhuming bones. The problem with exhumation was it silenced any doubts that the desaparecidos were alive. Bonafini's group took up slogans like "aparición con vida" [we want them alive] and "Con vida los llevaron con vida los queremos" [They took them alive, we want them alive] which served to emphasize their point that their children could not be declared dead and left in the past⁶⁶. They refused any compensation for their children and maintained the vocabulary of "desaparecidos" in the political dialogue. It was crucial to their ideology that the dead would lose their voice and any hope of justice, so it was important to keep the desaparecidos alive. Part of keeping their children alive meant taking up their role in politics. Since many of the missing people were left wing activists, Bonafini's group adopted the ideology of their children with the motto "el otro soy yo" (the other is I). With this tagline, Bonafini intended to make her faction a voice for other marginalized sectors of Argentine society. For example, the Association protested the government's eviction of an ethnic Chaco community in 2006⁶⁷. The Association advertised itself through a newspaper, continued protests, and a university⁶⁸. The radical nature of the Association made them a target for attacks. Besides several break-ins at the headquarters of the organization, Hebe Bonafini received personal death threats and had her home invaded by secret police (Bonner 109). The faction expanded outside of its original, personal goals into a political voice for more than just the desaparecidos.

⁶⁶Malomud, Marina. "Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo: Group Development from Single-Issue Protest Movement to Permanent Political Organization."

⁶⁷Peluffo, Ana. "The Boundaries of Sisterhood".

⁶⁸Briggs, Elizabeth. "Beloved Elderly Women No More."

Both factions continue to protest in the Plaza de Mayo every Thursday at 3:30 p.m., but the two groups march separately. The Association refuses to work with any nongovernmental organizations that work with the government, so it sustains none of the ties that the Founding Line has with similar human rights organizations⁶⁹. The factions have differing policies and political styles, and the leadership of Hebe Bonafini is also an internal divide. Founding Line members accuse her of being too combative as well as too controlling of the group. She continues to be the strongest voice of the Association and controls her faction with almost total power. Bonafini's refusal to accept any memorials in honor of the disappeared (even a university classroom in honor of her sons) angered Founding Line leaders like Renee Epelbaum, who would insist that memorials were necessary for historical memory⁷⁰.

Bonafini had always been a divisive figure within the Madres, but she was able to cause decisive internal conflict only at this point. The new selective benefit of the group was the power that came from recognition of the movement, and this could be achieved even if the group was split. The Madres could not afford for internal debate to divide them during the junta, or the movement would have failed. It was only as the selective benefit evolved, and the group identity was no longer threatened by outside sources that the Madres could disagree internally. With less outside pressure on the movement to fail, internal conflict was able to surface. The timing of the split is crucial, as it shows that the Madres only allowed themselves to be divided when the overall movement and group identity was able to withstand the conflict.

⁶⁹Bonner, Michelle D. *Sustaining Human Rights: Women and Argentine Human Rights Organizations*. p.108. 2007.

⁷⁰Bouvard. *Revolutionizing Motherhood*. 154.

Other human rights groups like those begun by women in similar political circumstances in Chile dissolved with the return to democracy. Those human rights groups, formed by women, made the focus of their organization democracy or equality. The Madres were unique in that they not only used their femininity as protection and as a right to protest, but they made their protest through the framework of their motherhood⁷¹. Their initial goal was not political but physical. They wanted their children back, and the guilty to be punished for their crimes. Their familial connection to the victims and therefore their cause was not solved when democracy returned. The movement pushed forward, because the Madres were still mothers with missing children. The Association refused to give up its claim on motherhood with the death of their children. Bonafini made the claim that she was forever pregnant, not only did her disappeared sons live on in side of her, but she was giving birth to new “children” who would join the cause of the Madres in seeking justice⁷². Motherhood had given them a cause to protest, and Bonafini would direct their new goals out of their motherhood as well. If the mothers could not bring back the disappeared alive, then they would take up the mantle of their children and fight for their causes. The Madres would become the mothers of all Argentines who opposed the administration and adopted the desaparecidos’ liberal agenda. The framework of the movement did not change completely but adapted to the political climate. The Madres extended their fight for social justice to more than just the desaparecidos.

Although class, leadership, and the way of dealing with memory, played a role in the schism, these factors had always been present within the group. The schism

⁷¹ Bonner. *Sustaining Human Rights*. 200.

⁷²Bouvard. *Revolutionizing Motherhood*. 149.

finally occurred because of the timing in the political atmosphere. The Founding Line members were ready to bury their children and memorialize them as a reminder to Argentina to prevent such a tragedy from happening again. To them, the best way to move forward was to work with the government despite their disagreement over the military trials in order to advance democracy and freedom. On the other hand, Bonafini and the Association saw memorials as a strategy to relieve guilty consciences⁷³. Instead of memorials, they want other young Argentines to step up and take up the same reform issues of the desaparecidos. The Association saw working with the Alfonsín administration as accepting its leniency of military crimes. The new democracy was corrupt, and the country needed reform to better the lives of all citizens. The Founding-Line with its middle and upper class members did not view their purpose to speak for unrepresented groups like the workers' unions. To keep up the living memory of their children, the Association adopted liberal reforms of the desaparecidos into their agenda. One group could accept the tragedy and move on with the government's trajectory for the future, but the other intended to mold Argentine society to fit its plan for the future without letting go of the past.

⁷³Bouvard. *Revolutionizing Motherhood*. 153.

The Kirchners

“La defensa de los derechos humanos ocupa un lugar central en la nueva agenda de la República Argentina. Somos hijos de las Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo. Y por ello insistimos en apoyar de manera permanente el fortalecimiento del sistema internacional de protección de los derechos humanos y el juzgamiento y condena de quienes los violen. Todo ello con la cosmovisión de que el respeto a la persona y su dignidad deviene de principios previos a la formulación del derecho positivo y reconocen sus orígenes desde el comienzo de la historia de la humanidad. Respeto a la diversidad y a la pluralidad y combate sin tregua contra la impunidad constituyen principios irrenunciables de nuestro país después de la tragedia de las últimas décadas⁷⁴.” –Néstor Kirchner at the 58th Annual Assembly of the United Nations: September 25, 2003⁷⁵.

The disassociation from any political party was a part of the Madres’ identity since Argentina’s return to democracy. Although the Founding Line movement cooperated with President Alfonsín’s plans to accept and bury the dead and move on from the past, the group never allied itself with the president or his party. While both factions of the Madres and the group of Abuelas searching for their grandchildren remained politically active, they were not incorporated into any political party. The Association branch continued with their hard line activism against the government as

⁷⁴ “The defense of human rights is central to the new agenda of Argentina. We are children of the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo. And this is why we insist on permanently supporting the strengthening of the international system for the protection of human rights and the prosecution and conviction of those who violate them. All of this with the worldview that respects the person and his or her dignity comes from earlier principles on the formulation of positive laws and recognize its origins from the beginning of the history of mankind. Respect for diversity and plurality and the relentless combat against impunity are indispensable principles of our country after the tragedy of the last decades.”

⁷⁵ *El País*. “Discurso Completo de Kirchner en la ONU”. September 25, 2003.

a whole as they favored a reconstruction of society at the basic level. However, the Madres, and in particular the Association, altered their political stance after the election of Néstor Kirchner in 2003. During the presidencies of Néstor Kirchner and later his wife Kristina, the Madres became closely associated with Kirchnerism.

Néstor Kirchner assumed the presidency of Argentina after former president Carlos Menem withdrew from a runoff. Kirchner's Justicialist Party considered itself a holdout from the Peronist era, and under Kirchner's leadership, the party leaned left of center mixing socialism, radicalism, and nationalism. His populist party garnered the support of the trade unions whose fight for better standards had allied them with the Association and Hebe Bonafini⁷⁶. Kirchner presented himself as an outsider coming in to clean house, and he removed several military officials with reputations tainted by the Dirty War from power.

The Kirchners adopted a more leftist ideology than the previous presidents, which pushed them closer to the leftist vision of the Association, who based their ideology off of the work of the desaparecidos. The Association of Madres supported many of the actions taken by the Kirchners. When Nestor was in office, he nationalized the postal service, the water utility service, the control of the radio and electronics sector, an energy transportation company, and the railroads; all of which had previously been controlled by foreign companies⁷⁷. The Association was largely in favor of the nationalization of Argentine industries. All branches of the Madres

⁷⁶ Petras, James F. and Henry Veltmeyer. *What's Left in Latin America?: Regime Change in New Times*. 78.

⁷⁷ "The Nationalization of Aerolíneas Argentinas and Austral: Will the Government Set Them Straight?" 2008.

group met with Kirchners at various points throughout their presidencies. It was during these meetings that the Madres expressed their support in annulling the Punto Final and Obediencia Debida laws. The Madres had high expectations with the election of Néstor Kirchner. Bonafini went so far as to remark, “Kirchner nos crea grandes expectativas, no esperanzas todavía. No es igual a todos los anteriores (presidentes) como habíamos creído”^{78,79} The rhetoric of the Madres and the Kirchners reflected a mutual appreciation.

One of the key issues separating the Madres from the prior governments was the continued injustice regarding the military personnel responsible for the disappearances. The Full Pardon and Immunity Laws passed under President Alfonsín in 1988 kept justice from being realized in Argentina. Néstor Kirchner made the overturning and restarting of the Junta Trials a cornerstone of his political agenda⁸⁰. The timing of the issue played a key role in its success. Unlike president Alfonsín’s term in office, the Argentine military was significantly weaker when Kirchner showed his support in overturning the immunity rulings. Alfonsín’s timing as the first president after the Junta left him with a democratic government still vulnerable to a military coup. The military had loosened its hold on power, but it was not defeated. In 2003, Kirchner’s Argentina suffered economically but had little possibility of a return to military rule. Since the years of Alfonsín, the military budget had been severely cut and an all-volunteer force had been created.

⁷⁸ “Kirchner creates in us great expectations, so we are not yet hopeless. He is not the same as the previous (presidents) as we had thought.”

⁷⁹ “30 AÑOS DE DEMOCRACIA”

⁸⁰ “Los 100 días de Kirchner”

Also, the international community revisited the issue of the unprosecuted military leaders. Nations like Spain, Italy, Germany, and France started trials for the murders of their citizens by Argentine officers in the Dirty War. The number of extradition requests was seen as international support for resumed prosecution of Dirty War crimes⁸¹. With both international and domestic support, the Argentine Supreme Court declared the amnesty laws unconstitutional by a 7-1 vote in June 2005. The overturning of the laws was based on precedence from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which limited the ability of member-states to enact amnesty laws for crimes against humanity. The court's decision meant that hundreds of human rights cases could be reopened⁸². While the Madres heralded Néstor Kirchner as the first of the democratic presidents to actually seek justice, the timing and international environment were key factors in his support of the trials.

From the time of his election in 2003, Néstor Kirchner reconstructed the military in a way that pleased the Madres organization and other human rights movements. He removed top officers with Dirty War histories, centralized civilian control over the military, and appointed a defense minister with a human rights background. Although there was no serious threat of a coup, the military protested the actions of Néstor Kirchner. Despite rising tensions among the armed forces, Kirchner was not intimidated by the military threats. As a speaker at a military event in 2003, Kirchner said, "I want to make it clear, as president of this nation, that I am not afraid

⁸¹ Gashe, Vicky. "Truth vs. Right to Privacy"

⁸² Rohter, Larry. "With Immunity From Extradition Revoked, Argentines Face Human Rights Trials in Europe."

of you... We want an army that is completely separate from state terror.⁸³ With his support, the Supreme Court quashed the immunity laws in 2005, and the first trial of a military official began in June 2006⁸⁴. Even with his strides taken against the military, Kirchner's treatment of the Dirty War did not meet the Association's goals. His creation of a Memory Museum at the location of one of the most notorious torture centers of the Dirty War was not supported by the Association as it went against their refusal to acknowledge the missing as dead. Some Argentines saw Kirchner's actions as a means of solidifying leftist support rather than any true commitment to the Madres cause. The reopening of the trials created a small backlash against him and the Madres, because there were many in the Argentine population who saw the trials as reopening a closed wound.

Apart from the military trials, another major law passed under the Kirchner administration generated more backlash against the Madres and the government. The Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, an associated group of the Plaza de Mayo movement had been pushing for DNA identification of remains for over three decades. Since the founding of the organization in 1983, the goal of the Abuelas movement has always been to identify the youngest victims of the Dirty War: the children born to imprisoned desaparecidos who were allegedly given to pro-military families. Because of their work, the Abuelas heavily campaigned for the incorporation of an identity law into the Argentine Constitution. In 1987, the National Bank of Genetic Data was established in Argentina with the purpose of housing genetic data. Families of the disappeared ones could submit DNA for testing against possible relatives. The next

⁸³ McDonnell, Patrick J. "Dirty War Trial Reflects Fresh Resolve."

⁸⁴ Gashe. "Truth vs. Right to Privacy."

step by the government to identify the missing children came in 1992 with the establishment of the Comisión Nacional por el Derecho a la Identidad (CONADI: National Committee for Identity Rights). The organization had both investigatory and prosecutorial powers with the goal of restoring children's identities and restoring them to their biological families. While progress in DNA identification had been made under previous administrations, the biggest step to advance identification came in 2009.

Argentine law NO. 26.549 passed on November 26, 2009 with large support from the Abuelas group and the Kirchner administration⁸⁵. Three months before the law permitting compulsory DNA testing was passed in the Senate, the Supreme Court ruled that judges could not force people to give blood samples to determine if they were children of the disappeared⁸⁶. However, they left the law open to permit less invasive ways of obtaining DNA, such as the seizure of personal items. Since 2006, judges had allowed house searches when individuals refused DNA testing to determine if they were children of the disappeared. In order to provide a standard approach to DNA testing in cases of illegal adoption, the Argentine Congress amended the law in 2009 to allow judges to order compulsory DNA testing in certain circumstances⁸⁷. The law specifies that if a criminal prosecution requires a DNA

⁸⁵ Gashe. "Truth vs. Right to Privacy."

⁸⁶ King "A Conflict of Interests: Privacy, Truth, and Compulsory DNA Testing for Argentina's Children of the Disappeared."

⁸⁷ King. "A Conflict of Interests"

sample from the victim, the extraction of the DNA must be done in a way that protects the victim's rights.

The Madres support the legislation as it can finally bring justice to some of the human rights violations of the Dirty War, namely the kidnapping of children. The Abuelas are grandmothers looking for their biological grandchildren, and they are running out of time to reunite with their missing family members. As stated earlier in the paper, the Abuelas fought so hard for the DNA law because it could gain them access to their ultimate selective benefit: their grandchildren. The DNA law makes it easier to discover the true identity of the children. While supported by the government and a number of human rights groups, there remains tremendous opposition to the law. A survey conducted by the conservative newspaper, *La Nación*, in November 2009 showed that 77% of its readers opposed the law.⁸⁸ The main argument against the DNA law is that it is a violation of privacy. It is the first of its kind as it requires compulsory DNA testing of citizens not suspected of crimes. It leads to the ongoing debate if people should have the choice to know their true identity or not. Some people would rather not know if their identity was falsified at birth as it would mean a total upheaval of their lives. Above all, many people feel like they should have a choice in the decision to know their identity.

Adding to the criticism of the DNA law of 2009 is the political environment surrounding the law. While the Madres have attached their organization to Kirchnerism, the nation has a more divided opinion of its leadership. The most powerful media outlet in Argentina, the Clarin group, supported a 2008 farmers' strike

⁸⁸ Richards, Joel. *New DNA Law in Argentina Will Help Find the Missing Grandchildren*, 11/12/09. North American Congress on Latin America.

that was a clear setback to the Cristina Kirchner administration. Some critics, including leaders in the rival Radical Civic Union party, allege that Cristina Kirchner's support of the DNA law stems from her ongoing dispute with Clarin's owner, Ernestina Herrera de Noble⁸⁹. The Abuelas suspected the two children of Herrera de Noble were adopted children of the desaparecidos. They sued the family to obtain DNA to test against samples of the families of the desaparecidos. The children did not want to provide their DNA as it could condemn their mother, but they were made to under the law⁹⁰.

In July 2011, the DNA belonging to Marcela and Felipe Noble could not be matched to any DNA in the CONADI databank collected from the known desaparecidos of 1975-1976. The Clarin media immediately celebrated the news as a victory and as a sign that the legal battle was part of the government's persecution in its desire to control the national media, but the Abuelas argued that the battle is still not over as they are still gathering more DNA for comparison to the Noble siblings⁹¹. Despite the accusations of the laws dubious legality, the Abuelas remain fierce advocates of the law as its intent is to help rebuild Argentine families. For the Abuelas, the focus is obtaining their group's selective benefit in finding their missing grandchildren and restoring them to their biological families. Some Argentines that disagree see it as a means of tearing families apart and opening old wounds from the country's past.

⁸⁹ King, "A Conflict of Interests."

⁹⁰ "Clarin group heirs DNA-test negative to 1975/76 families, victims of dictatorship." 2011

⁹¹ "Clarin group" 2011

The public perception of the Madres began to change with its perceived alliance to the Kirchners and its support of the DNA laws. The controversy and divided opinions on both of these issues hurt the credibility and prestige of the human rights organization. Other scandals regarding the finances of the Association also occurred during this time period. The Madres came to represent an image of corruption and government manipulation. The Left of Argentina used the Madres as a tool to garner support. Their goals for justice became confused with a political agenda in place of human rights issues. Triumphs for the Madres became government triumphs as well, which had hardly ever been true in the past. While the selective benefits of the movement were expanded, they came at the cost of public perception. Although huge steps were made in the direction of their goals, the Madres sacrificed their public perception of being above political games. The identity and ideology of the Madres became more centered on politics. Although it can be argued that the political manipulation was necessary to advance their goals, the Madres still altered their image by siding themselves with the government on many key issues. Many saw this as a contradiction of the Madres former group identity that had been defined by contentious politics with the government.

Analysis of the Madres in the Future

Scope Notes

This section of my paper assesses the possible changes in the Madres movement within the next twenty years. I chose this time frame as many of the Madres current concerns will undergo significant change during this period. The much desired mandatory DNA testing law will be implemented, and the trials of those responsible for the desaparecidos should continue. Besides these external factors, the Madres will also lose many original members in the next twenty years as they age. I will attempt to assess if these internal and external changes in the movement will lead to another drastic change like the radicalization and subsequent schism of 1986. In presenting this assessment, this section reviews open source information, describes key factors that would affect the structure of the Madres, and explores reasonable hypotheses for the future of the movement.

Key Questions

- Will the Madres movement continue to exist in the next 20 years after the deaths of many of the original Madres?
- If the Madres movement exists, will it be pursuing its current goals?
- What factors could lead to another radicalization of the movement?

Initial Hypothesis

My preliminary analysis gleaned from research in others sections of this paper indicates several things. The first is that the Madres have adapted to changing political environments in the past. The movement survived the transition from a dictatorship to democracy. Another is that the Madres and their goals have been

affected by external events in the past. The decision on how to continue the protest after the pardons for the military officials guilty of the Dirty War and the revelation of many of the bodies of the desaparecidos had a large role in the schism of the movement. It seems likely that the Madres will continue to protest in the next twenty years, but their protest issues will likely change. Recent decisions and laws by the government such as the mandatory DNA testing law and the resumption of trials for crimes of the Dirty War will affect the main concerns for protest of the Madres. These new decisions will also affect the public's view of the movement and its goals, as many of these new decisions are largely unpopular with the majority of Argentines although supported by the Madres. It is not certain how the issues of the Madres protest will change as some of their current goals are met under these new laws.

Key Assumptions

For the duration of researching and writing this section, certain things were assumed. I acknowledge that the following factors may change during the time frame of my study, but I cannot confidently predict these changes or their implications.

My study assumes that all three sections of the Madres, on the most fundamental level, will be affected by the same factors. It also assumes that the current regime's trials of those guilty for the Dirty War crimes will continue. Another assumption of my study is that the mandatory DNA law passed in recent years will be more broadly implemented within the next twenty years and used to identify the majority of the missing grandchildren.

Key Judgments

- A. I judge with moderately high confidence that the Madres movement will continue to exist twenty years from now.
- a. The Madres have protested since 1979, and they are highly organized and well supported financially.
 - b. The Madres have been successful in recruiting new members for their movement.
 - c. As proven in previous sections, the group maintains a strong identity in Argentina that is crucial for the group's survival.
- B. I judge with moderately high confidence that the Madres will have altered their goals as many of their current concerns will be addressed within the next twenty years.
- a. This judgment is supported by the research in the previous sections of this paper. The Madres have altered their goals before in order to remain relevant as a movement.
 - b. Throughout their history as a movement, the Madres have expanded the focus of their protest to broader issues as their initial goals have been met. An example of this would be the Association taking up the causes of the trade unions in 2006.
- C. I estimate with high confidence that the ongoing military trials and DNA testing law are factors that will affect the future goals of the Madres, but I can only judge with moderate confidence that these factors could lead to a more radical movement.

- a. The military prosecutions have been a goal of the Madres since the country's return to democracy. If this goal is met and the movement continues, a new goal will have to be taken up by the Madres.
- b. The Madres have been the main proponents for the government's DNA law. If the law becomes successfully implemented, the Madres will have to decide how to handle the changes brought by the revelation of the identities of the grandchildren.
- c. In their history, the Madres have undergone a process of radicalization in their goals when their current concerns have been met. When faced with deciding how to broaden their goals in the early 1980s, the process led to a splintering with a radical faction.

Analysis of Competing Hypotheses

I used an Analysis of Competing Hypotheses to find the future that seems most likely for the Madres based on currently available facts and evidence. The hypotheses are all mutually exclusive, and all come with the assumption that no unexpected event drastically alters Argentina in the near future.

Hypothesis A: In the next twenty years, the Madres will continue with their same level of social protest.

Hypothesis B: In the next twenty years, the Madres will become radical in their goals and protests.

Hypothesis C: In the next twenty years, the Madres movement will end with the death of the original members.

Table 1

Facts and Evidence	Hypothesis A	Hypothesis B	Hypothesis C
The Madres have successfully recruited younger members	+	+	—
DNA Testing Law, if implemented effectively, will identify missing grandchildren of the Abuelas in the near future.	—	+	+
The Madres adapted to changing goals in the past in order to continue protest.	+	+	—
The Madres, including radical leader Hebe Bonafini, are ageing and many have already passed away.	—		+
In times of transition in the past, the Madres splintered with many choosing to radicalize.	—	+	
The Madres are pleased with the current regime's prosecution of those guilty of crimes in the Dirty War.	+	—	

As you can see in Table 1, an addition symbol indicates that the facts or evidence support the hypothesis. A minus symbol indicates that the facts or evidence refute the hypothesis, and a blank space means that the facts or evidence have no effect on the hypothesis. I drew upon facts and evidence shown in the previous sections of my thesis.

Hypothesis B is the most supported hypothesis for the future of the Madres.

Hypothesis B, the Madres radicalization in the next twenty years, is supported by the past of the movement. The Madres have already shown that they can adapt to many changes and continue with the movement. In a previous transition period in Argentine recent history, the group had already taken a step toward radicalization once their original goals had changed. As the movement ages, the radical leader Hebe Bonafini will step down from power, but this is counterbalanced by the successful recruitment of younger members who have been educated on her radical line. Moreover, mandatory DNA testing in order to find the missing children will continue to be an issue even past its successful implementation. Widely disliked and considered an invasion of privacy by the Argentine population, their support of the DNA law will align the Madres along a more radical stance from the point of view of the population.

When applying the facts and evidence to the other hypotheses, I bolded the negative sign for Hypothesis C based on the evidence that the Madres have successfully recruited a younger generation to take up their work. Since the Madres have been preparing a new generation of persistent protesters, I found this evidence very strongly refuted Hypothesis C. Hypothesis A was supported by some evidence,

but the history of the Madres movement worked as evidence against this hypothesis. The Madres had already demonstrated a radicalization in the past, and it seems unlikely that when faced with a changing political environment the movement will not alter itself to adapt. The implementation of the DNA law could accomplish one of the movement's goals by identifying the missing grandchildren. Once this goal is met, it is more likely that the Madres will continue seeking justice but under the headline of a new goal as they have done in the past. One of the points of my thesis is the evolution of the Madres movement, and there is not sufficient evidence at the time to indicate that the Madres have become a static movement. Therefore, Hypothesis B is the most likely future of the Madres in this analysis.

Conclusion

The Madres stand out as a social movement because of their unique identity and long-lasting influence. Instead of losing recognition or legitimacy, they have gained it in some political aspects. For almost forty years, the Madres have given a voice to the silent in Argentina. However, the goals and structure of the movement have changed like the Argentine political scene in the last four decades. The movement has accomplished some of its goals but also actively pursuing new ones.

The Madres continue to exist as a movement because of a variety of factors evidenced in earlier sections. The Madres formed as an organized group capable of collective action in order to pursue a specific action. The women were attracted to the group, because of its selective benefit: information about the missing people. Women continued in the movement after the fall of the junta, because the organization still claimed a selective benefit even under the new democracy. Although the disappearances ended, the quest for information concerning the lost children was still very much alive. The Madres persisted with their goal to find the truth about the fates of the desaparecidos, and the selective benefit of this information led to continued membership. The Madres wanted the new democracy to give them the information regarding their children. In this manner, Olson's theory of selective benefits was important to the lasting nature of the movement.

Once the Madres obtained their selective benefit, the movement could have faded away. Many social movements whose cause was centered on pro-democracy ceased to exist a few years after democratic elections like the Solidarity movement in Poland, but the Madres formed an identity apart from political goals. The Madres

movement had the three characteristics identified by Stahler-Sholk et al. that defined many social movements in Latin America, chiefly the autonomy from political institutions and the quest for social justice for particular groups. The Madres goals of social justice set them apart from many pro-democracy social movements, but there was also a commonality between the Madres movement and other movements seeking social reform. For example, the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s also engaged in contentious politics in order to achieve a broader social justice.

The Madres longevity as a movement can be attributed to more than Olson's identified selective incentives. The Madres did not dissolve when they discovered the truth about their children, because they had inadvertently transformed themselves into an exclusive group with a recognizable identity. The strength and importance of this identity kept the movement relevant. Unlike most social movements, the members of the Madres had blood ties to their membership. All of the original members were mothers seeking their lost children, and they shared a common bond as grieving mothers. Although new members are encouraged to become involved with the organization, they can never become "Madres" unless they lost a child to the Proceso. The identity of the group remains anchored to the familial ties that started the movement. The movement prompted the formation of organizations based on familial ties to "disappeared" citizens in other countries with similar state-repression like Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay.⁹² The movements in these countries were smaller as there were fewer disappearances and therefore fewer "Madres."

The Madres revealed their solidarity through their well-organized and recognizable structure. The Madres had created an image of themselves using their

⁹² Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*. 189.

white headscarves. Their engagement in contentious politics was another means of creating an identity. Their street marches and protests against the political institutions, under both the juntas and the democratic governments, had created an identity of us vs. them. Not only were they a recognizable group in Argentina and the world, the Madres were an exclusive group. Members were related to the desaparecidos and special recognition was given to original members of the group. Their strong group identity, usually in contrast to the government, was key to the movement's survival. The recognition of the organization became a new selective benefit offered with joining the movement. The Madres have made use of their strong collective identity to continue collective action.

While their participation in contentious politics and identity branding made them a recognizable movement in Argentina, the movement did not retain a singular direction. While personality clashes were a part of the movement from its inception, the Madres did not break into two groups until 1986. The Madres had received their selective benefit from their movement but were not satisfied with the answers they received about the desaparecidos. The actual break within the group came during this time period, because they disagreed on what the new purpose of the movement would be. They were able to move in different directions, because their first common interest had already been met: they knew the fate of the desaparecidos. There were still important issues to deal with like the punishment of the guilty officer and the manner of dealing of memory, and there were different ways of handling the new issues. During the junta rule, the Madres had no room for dissenting voices as discord within the group would lead to failure. Unity through the formation of a single

collective identity and course of action was crucial for the success of the movement. After meeting their initial goal and no longer suffering from the same level of threats, the Madres had the opportunity to take the movement in different directions.

Under the current government administration, the Madres have continued to put forward new goals to bring justice to their lost children. Although they have aligned themselves with the government over some issues, they still remain separate from any political party. The Madres retain their identity as an external force working to enact change. The collective identity remains strong even as they recruit others to join their cause. The movement continues to offer the selective benefit of recognition and a voice in Argentina.

The Madres are an example of a long-lasting social movement whose members benefitted originally from selective incentives, but the group also developed a goal of social justice. Like many social movements, the Madres used contentious politics to protest a political regime. Through their acts of peaceful resistance, the Madres created a group identity that is crucial to group formation. The shared loss of a child was a unique bond between the members of the movement. Their strong dedication to their goal—fighting for justice for their children—motivated the Madres to keep fighting.

Through my analytical section on the future of the Madres, I assessed that the Madres will continue as a movement in the next twenty years. Despite the aging of the original members, new recruits have stepped out to continue the movement. As evidenced in this paper, the strong brand identity of the Madres as well as their highly organized and well funded structure insures their survival. As new laws are passed

and the prosecutions of Dirty war criminals continue, the goals of the Madres are likely to expand once again, which could lead to another radicalization of their goals.

I now understand why I saw two separate groups walking in the plaza that day. I also know why opinion about the Madres is so divided. However, the Madres movement has outlasted internal division and criticism from the government and civilians alike. Unlike many of the other social movements in Argentina that arose under the junta and then disappeared, the Madres created a strong identity for their movement. The recognition they gained from their engagement in contentious politics became a selective benefit for membership in the group as it created a certain identity for its members. Despite the evolution of the movement in the last four decades, the Madres' strong group identity and the benefit of power and recognition that comes from being a part of the movement have kept it active.

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