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# Women against Dictatorship and Repression: A comparative study of the women's organizations formed in Chile and Argentina respectively between 1973-1990 and 1976-1983

Ariana L. Awad

*Union College - Schenectady, NY*

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Women against Dictatorship and Repression: A comparative study of the women's organizations  
formed in Chile and Argentina respectively between 1973-1990 and 1976-1983.

By  
Ariana L. Awad

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in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for Graduation

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## Abstract

This project is a comparative case study between the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina who formed during the dictatorship of the military junta from 1976 to 1983 and the groups of women that formed organizations in Chile under Pinochet beginning in 1973. The thesis looks at the roles of specific institutions, such as their respective governments, the United States and the Catholic Church and how they differed in each country. The thesis not only examines the institutional influences on the movements but also how both of their coalitions' outcomes were influenced by historical factors. At first glance, the obvious answer as to why the Mothers of Argentina are better known than the women of the disappeared in Chile is the statistical fact that more people were disappeared in Argentina over a shorter period of time. Estimates state that as many as 30,000 people disappeared over 7 years in Argentina while an estimated 3,000 disappeared over 17 years in Chile. Also, the Catholic Church in Argentina supported the military junta so the Mothers were forced to look elsewhere, including making a famous trip to Italy to meet with the Pope; while the Catholic Church helped the women in Chile, which meant that they did not take the same measures the Mothers did to gain international attention. The role of the United States in both coups and dictatorships was similar because it began as an obstacle working against both movements of women. In Argentina, however, it began to play a more proactive role with the presidency of Jimmy Carter. Other factors addressed in this study include Argentina hosting the World Cup in 1978, benefit concerts led by Amnesty International, an analysis of the targeted individuals who were disappeared, the changes in the constitutions, and many other factors such as feminism and the role of motherhood. All of these factors come together to determine how certain institutions effected each movement and explain why the Mothers in Argentina have had greater recognition in their cause than the women in Chile.

## Chapter One: Literature Review

On September 11, 1973, La Moneda Palace, a building where the seat of the President and cabinet ministers are located in Santiago, was attacked full force by the Chilean military in an effort to establish a dictatorship. Augusto Pinochet, a man who was an army general appointed by President Allende, was behind the attack that resulted in the death of Allende. From this day forward, Chile was changed forever. A brutal dictatorship that would become infamous for its use of state terrorism would have power over the country for the next seventeen years.

Only three years later did similar events play out in Chile's neighboring country of Argentina. On March 24, 1976, a military junta came to power after overthrowing President Isabel Peron. For the next seven years, Argentina became a country that turned on its own citizens, torturing, and killing thousands it claimed to be subversive to the government. This time period, which lasted until 1983, became known as the "Dirty War"<sup>1</sup>, or more exactly "El Proceso".

Over three thousand lives were lost in Chile under the Pinochet dictatorship. Over thirty thousand lives were lost in Argentina under the military repression. Many more were jailed and forced into exile. As mothers and women sought out the whereabouts of their disappeared<sup>2</sup> loved ones, they started to create support systems among themselves and found power in numbers.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "Dirty War" is often disputed. The term was originally used by the Argentine military junta because they had declared a so called war on those they considered subversive. Through their National Reorganization Process, they sought to cleanse the nation, hence the use of "dirty". However, many disagree with the term because it implies that there were two sides but in reality it was an attack by the junta on the people of Argentina.

<sup>2</sup> The term "disappeared" is used to describe the individuals who were kidnapped by the government during the dictatorships discussed in this thesis. The governments at the time denied having any role or knowledge of the disappearances, making it seem that the missing had simply vanished into thin air. The fates of the disappeared remain unknown today and are presumed dead.

Together, they formed organizations that demanded justice and accountability. In Chile, one of the most active organizations became the Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos (AFDD), or the Association of Relatives of the Disappeared that consisted mostly of women searching for their disappeared male family members; while in Argentina, las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, or the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, became the moral and political force fighting for the exposure of the atrocities being committed in their country and keeping the voices of their disappeared children alive. Since the end of Chile's dictatorship and Argentina's repression, countless books of nonfiction and fiction, articles, newspaper accounts, documentaries, fictional movies, published interviews and testimonies have appeared. The subjects of these sources vary but all come together to provide an understanding of how the similarities and differences between the two organizations of women led to their different outcomes of success and recognition.

In *Taking Back the Streets*, Temma Kaplan discusses demonstrations held by women and youth throughout the world in the twentieth century. Her book gives in depth details of events leading up to the emergence of authoritarian governments, the formation of organizations, the power of protest and its effects. Kaplan argues that these demonstrations, seen throughout Latin America, Europe, North America, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, equated democracy with social justice and took to the streets to protest publicly in order to expose the injustices implemented by their authoritative governments. When specifically discussing Chile, Kaplan states that Pinochet targeted liberals and leftists because they supported the Popular Unity coalition that Salvador Allende had belonged to. Therefore, Pinochet sought to oppress those he

feared<sup>3</sup>. Pinochet also sought to exterminate any other movements for social change and declared that all forms of protest were illegal. Since public protest risked kidnap, torture, and death, women of the disappeared began to organize themselves in their homes and then into community centers when their numbers grew. What Kaplan states is that in Chile, people of all ages were disappeared, 94.5% of the disappeared were men, which meant that women lost not only their children, but also husbands, brothers, fathers, and loved ones from different age ranges<sup>4</sup>. The women who organized themselves in Chile therefore consisted of not only mothers, but of all kinds of women who had lost different family members. The women met to sew arpilleras which are tapestries depicting stories that represented what was occurring in Chile. Some depicted kidnappings, different forms of torture, police gassing crowds, and gravesites. These arpilleras were then smuggled through the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, or the Vicariate of Solidarity, through the Catholic Church in order to raise money for public relief<sup>5</sup>. *Taking Back the Streets* gives a detailed account of the role of the Catholic Church in Chile. It exposes that, unlike what is seen in Argentina during its time of repression, the Catholic Church in Chile helped the Chilean people. There was a separation of Church and State and the Church became a place of safety and support against the government. Through the smuggling of their tapestries, the Chilean women were able to draw attention to their cause and gained international support and aid.

In addition, Kaplan discusses the different groups that formed in response to the disappearances in Chile, such as the Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos (AFDD), the Comité Pro-Paz (Committee for Peace) and the Equipo de Pobladora (the Working-

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<sup>3</sup> Temma Kaplan, *Taking Back the Streets: Women, Youth and Direct Democracy* (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2004), 25.

<sup>4</sup> Kaplan, 74.

<sup>5</sup> Kaplan, 74.

Class Women's Community Group)<sup>6</sup>. There were also many other groups that were formed, some of which focused on human rights while others focused on political, economic, and social factors against the Pinochet dictatorship. With women making up the majority of all of these groups, the groups of women searching for their disappeared family members were not the only ones protesting and therefore, organizations like the AFDD did not stand out in their efforts like the mothers of Argentina did. Women were fighting not only for justice for their disappeared loved ones, but they were also fighting to gain a voice in their country and social rights. At the end of the discussion on Chile, Kaplan states the successes the women had in international exposure in their fights for human rights and "the emancipation of women of all classes into every level of public life"<sup>7</sup>. The organizations allowed women a place to become politically active and to take struggle into the public sphere.

By contrast, as Kaplan argues, the situation in Argentina differed for Chile. While discussing Argentina's so-called "Dirty War", Kaplan discusses the idea that the government was trying to wipe out an entire generation of young people who were seeking social change. This provides the explanation as to why the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo became the strongest organization of women to protest against the authoritative rule, because they were the group of women being affected the most by the disappearances of their children. Comparisons and contrasts become apparent between the different organizations in Chile and Argentina. The forces of the different institutions, such as the Catholic Church, and their effects on their efforts become clear. For example, the Catholic Church in Argentina supported the military government and could not be trusted by its followers. Also, *Taking Back the Streets* exemplifies the importance of international events, such as the 1978 World Cup held in Buenos Aires, and

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<sup>6</sup> Kaplan, 81.

<sup>7</sup> Kaplan, 101.

the benefit concerts held by famous rock bands, such as the Rolling Stones, U2 and Sting that brought attention to the crisis. The book also states that reasons behind the turning point of the division of the Mothers. Kaplan states, “the disappearances had united the Madres; constitutional government tore them apart”<sup>8</sup>. Different historical circumstances and the events that took place during the times of repression in Chile and Argentina influenced the two groups of women. *Taking Back the Streets* provides a very detailed explanation of them and is an imperative source in understanding the similarities and differences between them.

*Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* by Marguerite Guzman Bouvard is a book similar to Kaplan’s *Taking Back the Streets* but focuses solely on the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. The purpose of the book is to “trace the history of the Mothers as they changed from an informal group of housewives searching for their children to an internationally known organization demanding civil rights in the face of a ruthless dictatorship”<sup>9</sup>. Though there are sources on the Mothers of Argentina critical of their positions, this book is very sympathetic and contains poems and quotes from interviews with well-known Argentina figures. Two of these figures include Rafael Videla, one of the three military leaders that possessed power during the Dirty War, and Hebe de Bonafini, one of the founding mothers of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. *Revolutionizing Motherhood* focuses a lot of detail on the institutions of government, society, family, and religion and how they have played a part in the Mothers’ actions and success.

*Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty War”* by Diana Taylor is a book of several essays that focus on different topics such as the Mothers as

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<sup>8</sup> Kaplan, 133.

<sup>9</sup> Marguerite Guzman Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (Wilmington, North Carolina: Scholars Resources, Inc., 1994), 16.

public spectacles, the relation between gender and the nation, and the strategic forms of torture used on the detained. Taylor argues that gender and the female body were attacked by the military junta. This included attacks on the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. She states,

“The junta also identified the Madres de Plaza de Mayo as terrorists, this time as ‘emotional terrorists,’ because they women insisted on obtaining information about their missing children who had been abducted and disappeared by military forces. Here, however, the junta was trapped in a patriarchal discourse that honored motherhood. The junta tried to sidestep the issue by claiming that the women had renounced their right to motherhood by being bad mothers, mothers of subversives. As subversives were considered nonhuman..., the Madres were thus nonmothers”<sup>10</sup>.

The perception the junta had on the female and motherhood hindered the Mother’s abilities to raise awareness and protest since they too became the target of the junta’s attacks. Further, the essay “Military Males, ‘Bad’ Women, and a Dirty, Dirty War” argues that the government perceived the Mothers as a threat to the nation because they were stepping out of their homes, their designated spot in their patriarchal society. As Taylor explains, “The Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, like a Greek chorus, were a physical reminder of the personal and national dramas that violence conspired to erase from history”<sup>11</sup>. The essay “Trapped in Bad Scripts: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo” explains how the boundaries of the role of motherhood were changed by the mothers. It argues that they turned motherhood into a performance and in turn, gained political power. The essay also states that they became a national spectacle that broke the nation’s silence. The essay focuses on the idea of motherhood and how it became a driving force behind these women’s efforts and how they changed the traditional roles of women in Argentinean society.

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<sup>10</sup>Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty War”* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1997), 83.

<sup>11</sup> Taylor, 125.

A large factor that determined and affected the existence, recognition, and success, or lack thereof, of both organizations of women in Chile and Argentina was the role and the involvement of the United States and other foreign countries. The United States supported both the Chilean and Argentinean coups and the dictatorships that followed soon after. It has been established that the CIA was actively working with and contributing funding to both governments through declassified documents that became public in the “Chile Documentation Project”. Much has been written on the topic, especially on President Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Not only are there declassified reports, but there are also several journal articles and books written on the topic. One book is *Nixon, Kissinger, and Allende: US Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile* by Lubna Qureshi. This book focuses on the threat of Marxism felt by the Nixon Administration before and after the election of Salvador Allende. It focuses on Nixon’s relationship with Latin America before the 1973 coup and the actions by the CIA to try to sabotage the outcomes of the 1970 elections. When that failed, Nixon and the CIA took further measures by helping to coordinate and fund the coup led by Pinochet against Salvador Allende.

A book that also opposes the United States’ role in supporting and funding right-winged dictatorships is *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* by Marguerite Feitlowitz. This book, however, focuses on the influence the United States had in Argentina during the Dirty War among other important topics that affected the Mother’s efforts. Feitlowitz speaks out against the US School of the Americas established in South America that helped train soldiers in torture techniques. Though it is a brief section in the entire book, it gives in depth detail of the US involvement with the Argentinean military junta and how they kept their involvement a secret. Also, the chapter “The Scilingo Effect” gives insightfulness to the reasons

the Law of Due Obedience was passed that dismissed all charges against those found guilty for their participation in the Dirty War other than the highest commanding military officials. The passage of this law resulted in the Mothers' continual efforts of raising awareness throughout the decades following the end of the dictatorship which is a very large reason as to why their organization is arguably more well-known than the ones established in Chile.

*A Nation of Enemies: Chile under Pinochet* by Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela is a very resourceful book on the circumstances leading up to the 1973 coup, the seventeen year dictatorship of Pinochet, and life in Chile after its return to democracy in 1990. The authors seem to take a neutral stance on the events and lay them out for the reader to interpret them. For example, though the following point they bring up is disputed, the authors argue that although Pinochet's dictatorship obviously committed several human rights violations, it also brought economic prosperity to Chile and along with other factors, has created the prosperous Chile we see today. One chapter in the book sheds detailed light on how the law in Chile was changed under Pinochet. It goes into detail about the law and the suspension of the Constitution and the new Constitution put in place by Pinochet. The government as an institution played an enormous role in Chile and largely affected the women's organizations searching for the disappeared. As stated in the book, the fact that many judges either supported Pinochet or were too afraid to speak out against him resulted in the cases being thrown out and prevented justice from ever occurring. When many women tried to file missing person's reports, they either couldn't because of the lack of evidence or were denied so in order to prevent a case from being opened. The new Constitution put in place by Pinochet also affected him stepping down as dictator in 1990 because it stated that a plebiscite would be held and the majority of the votes stated "no", that the population did not want him to remain in power. This marked the return to democracy

and led to the investigations of human rights violations which positively impacted the women in organizations like the AFDD. Overall, the book takes an unbiased stance while discussing the roles and impact the many different institutions had in Chile and is extremely informative for the subject of this thesis.

*State Terrorism in Latin American: Chile, Argentina, and International Human Rights* by Thomas C. Wright is similar to Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela's *A Nation of Enemies: Chile under Pinochet*. It gives a vital overlook of the dictatorships in Chile and Argentina. Wright argues against the role of the Catholic Church in Argentina and credits the Church for its role in Chile. He condemns the role of the United States in both countries and argues that the Malvinas/Falkland Islands War was the reason for the decline in the junta's power in Argentina. He also explains the formation of the commissions that investigated human rights violations after the end of both dictatorships which greatly affected both women's movements. In Chile, the Commissions of Truth established brought many perpetrators to trial and the Chilean government admitted the role it played in the dictatorship which meant that many goals of organizations such as the AFDD were met. However, in Argentina, he argues that although commissions were created such as CONADEP, they did not result in the Mothers' goals since the government has not fully admitted the role it played in the Dirty War. This became the driving force behind the Mother's continual protests which has resulted in their greater recognition.

Jacobo Timerman's *Chile: Death in the South* was written in 1987, during Pinochet's dictatorship. He was an Argentine journalist who was detained by the government for being considered a subversive but did not become a victim of the Dirty War. Because of his personal experience in the Dirty War, he wrote this book to compare his experience and observations in Argentina to that of Pinochet's dictatorship. Though some may argue that there are better

sources to use when discussing the events in Argentina, Timerman provides primary observations from an eyewitness account that lived during the time of the two dictatorships. He draws comparisons between the two countries and gives an insider's perspective on the occurrences in Chile and Argentina.

*Power and Popular Protest* by Susan Eckstein covers many different Latin American movements including the women of Chile and the Argentine mothers. Eckstein argues that in Chile, prior to the 1973 coup, women took to the streets to protest. Although these women were from the right upper-class, they were still women taking to the streets. Therefore, the involvement and protests from the Chilean women of the disappeared was not as a rare sight as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo were because in Argentina, women did not take to the streets under the very patriarchal society because they did not possess a political voice. This, arguably, made the Mothers' statement more distinct.

The subsequent chapters will go into further detail on the effects the different institutions had on the Chilean and Argentinean women which caused them to differ in their social movements. Comparisons and contrasts will be made to determine how they were affected and how they presently are today. Primary sources, such as government reports, documentaries, testimonies, and interviews<sup>12</sup> will be used alongside the secondary sources discussed in this chapter. Through the use of these sources, the comparisons and contrasts made between the institutions that affected the movements of the women of the disappeared in Chile and the

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<sup>12</sup> I received an IEF (Internal Education Fund) grant from Union College to do independent thesis research in Chile. I spent one week in Santiago in December 2010. I conducted interviews and spoke with women who are still active in the AFDD. I also did a majority of my research at the Museum of Memory and Human Rights and visited several memorial sites attributed to the victims of the Pinochet dictatorship including Villa Grimaldi, the most infamous detention center during the dictatorship.

Mothers in Argentina will become more distinct and will provide evidence that the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo are more recognized than the women of the disappeared in Chile.

## Chapter Two: The Chilean Women Come Together

### Overview

Prior to 1973, Chile was one of the most stable and democratic countries in Latin America. However, that all changed on September 11, 1973 when the Chilean military, under the command of Augusto Pinochet, seized the Moneda Palace, resulting in the overthrow and death of President Salvador Allende. The next day, a military junta was established, composed of four leaders, General Augusto Pinochet from the Army, General Gustavo Leigh Guzmán, of the Air Force, Admiral José Toribio Merino Castro of the Navy and General Director César Mendoza Durán of the National Police. As history shows, Pinochet became the permanent leader of the junta.

Because Allende's presidency had been unpopular with the right at the time of the coup, the junta was easily able to achieve absolute power. Its primary goal was to create a governable state which meant the opposition had to be suppressed. In a country where seventy percent of the population was considered the opposition, since forty percent had voted for Allende's Popular Unity party and thirty percent had supported the Christian Democratic Party, Pinochet turned to methods of arrest and torture to suppress his political opponents. As stated by the British organization Remember Chile, "To last as long as Pinochet intended, the military regime had not only to neutralize the opposition, but completely destroy it"<sup>13</sup>. For the next 17 years, Chile would be ruled under a dictatorship that has become infamous for its application of state terrorism.

During the dictatorship, an estimated three thousand Chileans were disappeared by the government. Thousands more were arrested, interrogated, and detained by the government.

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<sup>13</sup> Remember- Chile Pinochet for Beginners, <http://www.remember-chile.org.uk/beginners/index.htm> (Nov. 29., 2001).

Most of the disappeared were kidnapped, tortured and killed. The targeted individuals differed in many aspects, including that they ranged in age, social class, profession, and gender. Though some of the forced disappearances by the government seemed random, they were tactical and strategic in order to create a controlled state and paranoia. During an interview with Gabriela Zuñiga, a Chilean woman who is still an active member of the Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos, or the Families of the Detained and Disappeared (AFDD), she stated that the government implanted state terrorism to paralyze society by targeting everyone. She gave an example of an eleven year old boy, the youngest known disappeared during the dictatorship, who was kidnapped and killed. The motives for his disappearance are only explained by wanting to use his forced disappearance as an example to others that anyone was vulnerable and a potential target<sup>14</sup>.

Those who were kidnapped or forced to disappear were brought to government detention centers. These detention centers were usually isolated and their true purpose was disguised. The most notorious of these was Villa Grimaldi where an estimated 5,000 detainees were brought between 1974 and 1978. The Chilean secret police known as the National Intelligence Directorate (DINA) ran many of the detention centers including Villa Grimaldi<sup>15</sup>. These detentions were often the last known whereabouts of the permanently disappeared.

### The Rise and Fall of Allende

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<sup>14</sup> Gabriela Zuñiga, personal interview, December 13, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> "Operative teams had their quarters at Villa Grimaldi. They brought prisoners there for initial interrogation after arrest and devices specially designed for different forms of torture were kept there. Prisoners who were not subject to torture were also kept there, sometimes for long periods, awaiting possible new interrogations or a decision on their fate" Villa Grimaldi: Extracted from the Rettig Report, Derechos Chile ([http://www.chipsites.com/derechos/campo\\_santiago\\_villa\\_grimaldi\\_eng.html](http://www.chipsites.com/derechos/campo_santiago_villa_grimaldi_eng.html)), 2002.

In order to understand the coup, the dictatorship of Pinochet and the organization of the women searching for justice in Chile, it is important to look at the history and politics behind it all.

After unsuccessfully running for the presidency three times, leftist Salvador Allende was elected the President of Chile in 1970. As a member of the socialist Popular Unity coalition, Allende is considered to be the first democratically elected Marxist of any country in the Americas. The Popular Unity coalition was supported by not only Socialists but also Communists and most Radicals<sup>16</sup>. However, Allende had won the election by a small margin. He won 36.6% of the vote while the other two presidential nominees, Jorge Alessandri Rodriguez of the National Party and Radomiro Tomic of the Christian Democratic Party, won 35.3% and 28.1% of the votes, respectively. The results were sent to Congress because of the closeness in votes and it was declared that Allende was the winner.

Allende's Marxist views gained attention from other countries around the world including the United States. The Cold War was still occurring at the time and tensions between the Communist world and Western world were still high. The United States had been carefully following the events before the 1970 election in Chile because President Nixon did not support the Popular Unity. The CIA played a large role in trying to prevent Allende from being elected and was involved in the planning and support of the coup of 1973. This will be discussed further in chapter four. However, the United States took many measures to prevent and repress the spread of Marxism which was not an uncommon occurrence in Latin America countries under dictatorships. As stated in Jacobo Timerman's *Chile*,

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<sup>16</sup> Lubna Z. Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Press, 2009), 47.

“Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx have had little luck with Latin American dictatorships. Their books have been burned, at worst, or they have been banned. Study of their work in universities was prohibited, because they were held to blame for the misfortunes that some interludes of democracy have unleashed in Latin America...”<sup>17</sup>.

At the time of the 1973 coup, because of the many nationalizations implemented by Allende, Chile was “virtually bankrupt, beset by shortages, and runaway inflation, and increasingly ungovernable”<sup>18</sup>. The gap distinction between the social classes in Chile were becoming smaller and smaller under Allende which angered the upper-class right. Although unemployment decreased, inflation increased. In fact, there was twice as much currency circulating in the country during 1971 than there was in 1970<sup>19</sup>. Discontent from the right and the fear associated with the spread of communism seemed to set the stage for a revolution and that is why the coup did not come as a surprise to many in Chile.

Two years after Pinochet became dictator, what occurred in Chile unraveled throughout South America. The program known as Operation Condor swept through the Southern Cone in an attempt to prevent Marxism and communism from spreading and gaining power. Described as “the most sinister state-sponsored terrorist network in the Western Hemisphere, if not the world”, the United States and the CIA worked with the right-wings to prevent leftist leaders from exerting power through sabotage and helped to place right-wing leaders in their dictatorship positions<sup>20</sup>. Similar events paralleled those of Chile in Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Bolivia. During these rightist political repressions supported by the United States, an estimated 60,000 deaths have been attributed to Operation Condors<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Jacobo Timerman, *Chile: Death in the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 7.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas C. Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America: Chile, Argentina and International Human Rights* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007) 53.

<sup>19</sup> Qureshi, 104.

<sup>20</sup> Wright, 67.

<sup>21</sup> Taken from a display in the Museo de la memoria y los derechos humanos in Santiago, Chile, December 2010.

## Chile Under Pinochet

The Socialist, Marxist and other leftist political parties were banned under the new junta. Two days after the coup the junta dissolved Congress. Well known members and leaders of leftist parties began to be jailed or forced into exile within a few days of the coup. Economically, the junta began reforms on the economy to steer away from Allende's nationalization and economic programs and created an economy that isolated Chile from the rest of the world under conservative policies, including the United States support of laissez-faire and neoliberal theories.

The junta implemented changes to Chile so that the country would become isolated from the rest of the world. This way, they had more control and power over the country and people and the events occurring in Chile would remain relatively unknown. To wipe out any opponents that posed as threats to their new political agenda, the junta began to kidnap, torture and kill those they found to be subversive. As stated by Thomas Wright, "The annihilation of Marxism could not be achieved in a democratic climate; the annihilation of Marxism and of everyone who considered themselves pro-Marxist, neutral, lukewarm, undefined, was carried out with brutal methods of repression that had no limits"<sup>22</sup>. The term "politicide"<sup>23</sup> has been used to describe the essential political genocide occurring in Chile since those who were targeted by the junta were seen as potential political opponents to the right-wing government. The junta targeted leftists, unionists, journalists, guerillas, and sympathizers. Many of the subversives were men because in a patriarchal society, they made up much of the work force while the women remained in the home.

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<sup>22</sup> Wright, 47.

<sup>23</sup> The term "politicide" is used to describe a genocide where political opponents are targeted.

To create a state of terror, the government began to kidnap people in public and sometimes chose random victims to show that anyone was susceptible to being disappeared. As stated by Jacobo Timerman, “The government’s actions cannot be predicted. It strikes swiftly and with impunity. It never gives explanations”<sup>24</sup>. Many of the arrested and kidnapped were brought to the National Stadium. Though the exact number of detained there are unknown, estimates state that 40,000 people passed through the stadium. Also, the notorious Caravan of Death occurred in 1973 when the military death squad killed a recorded 75 political prisoners throughout Chile. This not only set the precedent of what would come, but also instilled fear. Continuing, disappearances were greatest during the first few years following the coup. Many chose not to recognize or acknowledge the disappearances, either to protect themselves or because they supported them. As Jacobo Timerman describes in *Chile*, his book examining the Pinochet dictatorship, “Many Chileans kept themselves aloof. The vast majority went about their everyday business, tied to routine, like sleepwalkers. The Chileans call this form of evasion ‘submarining’. They want to slip by, unnoticed, like submarines”<sup>25</sup>.

### Searching for the Disappeared

Guerrilla movements began to organize themselves after Pinochet became dictator. Such groups included GAP (Grupo de Amigos Personales), The Lautaro Youth Movement (MJL), and FPMR (Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez). The members of these groups became primary targets for the junta. The guerilla group that showed the most resistance against the dictatorship was the MIR (Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria). Because of their activism against the dictatorship, they suffered the most losses of members by the junta.

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<sup>24</sup> Timerman, 17.

<sup>25</sup> Timerman, 12.

As stated before, unionists, journalists, and intellectuals such as lawyers and professors began to disappear as well. Their disappearances sparked small groups, usually consisting of co-workers, to look for them and try to learn information of their whereabouts. It began to be known that most of the disappeared were imprisoned in concentration-like camps throughout the Chilean countryside. Many did not know why they were arrested or for how long they would be imprisoned. Those searching for them could not do anything to help them, since most of the disappearances were denied by the government. Gabriela Zúñiga, one of the most active members of the AFDD, stated during an interview that her husband had disappeared and when she went to authorities to ask questions, they merely told her that they knew nothing about his disappearance and that he must have run off with another woman. She later found out that he had been taken to a concentration camp isolated in the countryside of Chile. He still remains disappeared today and Gabriela knows very little of the details of what happened to him.

### Women Come Together

One of the first groups of women that were affected by the new dictatorship were the Women of Calama. In October 1973, men were taken from their homes in the indigenous settlements of Calama, a town about one thousand miles away from the capital of Santiago, and executed by military officials. Because of their arrival by helicopter, it is presumed that they belonged to the Caravan of Death. Twenty-six men, consisting of engineers, miners, lawyers, and journalists, were killed during this attack. The military officials threatened the wives of the dead to ensure their silence about what had occurred. As Jacobo Timerman stated, “It appeared that what had happened to the Women of Calama was a perfect example of the dictatorship

achieving its objective: the total silence of its victims”<sup>26</sup>. The women did keep silent. As Timerman further states,

“The case of the Women of Calama was not unique. Their passivity, their fears that the killers might return, the creation of the illusory graves to which they could take flowers and the long years that passed in silence have been repeated elsewhere [in Chile]”<sup>27</sup>.

The example of the Women of Calama shows those in isolated regions of the country were not aware of the exact events taking place elsewhere. Therefore, minimal efforts were made to investigate disappearances and executions. However, in larger cities, such as Santiago, women, like Gabriela Zúñiga, began to join with others when they realized that they were making little impact on finding out information of their loved ones’ whereabouts on the individual level. The women in urban areas had more connections to other women and began to see a repetition of other women’s accounts of their disappeared husbands. Similarly to how the Mothers of the Plaza of Mayo began to meet, Chilean women began to recognize each other in locations they sought information about the whereabouts of the disappeared, such as police station and churches. As a result, support groups and organizations of women began to form in hopes of finding answers.

### Arpillera Movement

Women in Chile during the early years of the Pinochet dictatorship and disappearances were expected to be at home. Chile was a patriarchal society, even before the 1973 coup. This is why, when women first began to join forces together, they began an arpillera movement because it involved a skill they were very familiar with; sewing. Women political prisoners also did the same. They began to sew arpilleras in the detention centers and hide notes in them that would be

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<sup>26</sup> Timerman, 28.

<sup>27</sup> Timerman, 31.

read once they were smuggled out of the centers. The arpilleras raised no suspicions in the jails because sewing was a common skill among Chilean women. As a side note, explained in the documentary “Mothers of the Disappeared”, men did not play a large role in social protests because they were chauvinist, as are many Latin American men. Therefore, some men criticized the women’s works and efforts, which is why the movement for justice was led mostly by women. However, the arpilleras initially served the women as a means of financial income since the bread winners of their homes were disappeared, however, they became the voices of the women.

Women began to meet at each other’s homes and sew large tapestries depicting what was occurring in Chile and the stories of the disappearances of their loved ones. It became not only a way to cope with their losses but also became one of the first steps in gaining attention to their efforts. The tapestries were secretly circulated, mostly through the Catholic Church with the help of Archbishop Raúl Silva Henríquez and the Vicariate of Solidarity, which will be further discussed in chapter five. The tapestries were first circulated locally, then throughout the country and eventually internationally. They became an organized social protest for the women. They also gave them political power since they were defying the government. The tapestries also became a way to spread awareness and gain international attention that would later help with investigations of human rights violations because it created networks that called attention to the violations taking place in Chile and further spread awareness.

The Catholic Church sold the tapestries around the world. In Toronto, Canada, exhibitions were set up with the support of many churches, organizations and universities<sup>28</sup>. As stated in the documentary, the tapestries “captured the hearts of the world” which led there to be

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<sup>28</sup> Les Harris, “Threads of Hope” (Title House, 2000).

many auctions where the tapestries were sold. This resulted in thousands of dollars being raised for the women in Chile. The money was used in Chile to open craft centers where more women could go to sew tapestries and for the Catholic Church to open more soup kitchens for those who were financially burdened by the loss of their disappeared relatives.

Many Chilean exiles in the United States and Europe played large roles in the spreading of the arpilleras around the world. The international success of the tapestries inspired women in Peru and South Africa to also sew tapestries depicting the atrocities occurring in their own countries. The widespread awareness of the Chilean tapestries created political pressure internationally which led to Amnesty International beginning investigations on the human rights abuses occurring under Pinochet<sup>29</sup>. Because the investigations were slow and did not provide answers, the women turned to other forms of protest.

### Rightist Women and Public Protests

Protesting on the streets in Chile was not an unknown sight before the 1973 coup. People took to the streets, as do many Latin Americans, to protest against a variety of issues. Right-wing women were seen protesting on the streets against Salvador Allende during the 1970 elections and during his first year of presidency. These women were of the middle and upper class protesting the Popular Unity party and Allende's reforms because neither benefited their social class. As explained in *Taking Back the Streets*,

“When they demonstrate in the streets, these women say they are doing so because they are struggling to fulfill their responsibility to provide for their families, and necessity has compelled them to seek relief from those who have made their task impossible”<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Kristen Walker, Chilean Women's Resistance in the Arpillera Movement, Council on Hemispheric Affairs, <http://www.coha.org/chilean-women's-resistance-in-the-arpillera-movement/> (June 2008).

<sup>30</sup> Kaplan, 46.

The women famously took to the streets with their pots and pans when Allende became president. Immediately after the elections, a group of women took to the streets wearing all black in a mock funeral to symbolize the death of democracy in Chile<sup>31</sup>. The actions by the women were seen and heard throughout the country and played a role in the coup of 1973. As Temma Kaplan states in *Taking Back the Streets*,

“Vivid images of Chilean women banging empty pots with lids and spoons, shouting for increased food supplies, claiming that the government was undemocratic, and urging the military to take power to end the ‘chaos’ came to haunt Allende’s regime in Chile”<sup>32</sup>.

As Margaret Powers further explains, women became politically active because many women felt threatened by the shortages of food and supplies that resulted under Allende. The shortages threatened the ability for the women provide for their families. Powers argues that being a woman was synonymous with being a mother and therefore, the shortages made it impossible for women to fulfill their social roles and took away a part of their identity. She states the scarcity of products

“...convinced a large number of Chilean women that the economic program of the UP government made their efforts as mothers and wives more difficult. Anti-Allende women argued that instead of improving women’s lives, the government harmed them. They used the rage and frustration the shortages produced to mobilize women against the government”<sup>33</sup>.

The right-wing women, through their political protests, demonstrated that they could gain a political voice and showed the importance of fulfilling their identities and social roles as women. Their activism set a precedent for the left-wing women who would also be robbed of their identities and would organize to create a movement against the authoritative power.

### Leftist Women and Public Protests

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<sup>31</sup> Kaplan, 47.

<sup>32</sup> Kaplan, 44.

<sup>33</sup> Margaret Power, *Right-wing Women in Chile: Feminine Power and the Struggle against Allende 1964-1973*, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 2002), 6.

The women who began sewing arpilleras took their social and political protests a step further by having demonstrations in the streets. The encouragement and support they received from internal and external organizations for their arpilleras gave them the courage to do so. At first, public protests were nonexistent bodies were purposely left on the streets to scare people from taking action. However, women began to take to the streets, wearing t-shirts with photos and information of their disappeared loved ones. As time passed by, the protests became bolder. Women began to chain themselves to fences and were arrested.

Their efforts in the arpillera movement and public protests attracted the attention of not only foreign countries and international organizations, but also celebrities and music groups. The attention gained from such popular public figures spread mass awareness to large audiences. For example, benefit concerts by U2 and Sting revolved around the issues of human rights violations in Chile and Argentina and were aired in countries all over the world. Songs were specifically written about the mothers and women of the disappeared.

### Memory and Remembrance

Many of the organizations that formed in response to the disappearances have erected memorials throughout Chile to remember the injustices that occurred during Pinochet's dictatorship. Such organizations include the AFDD who are responsible for the majority of memorials in Santiago. Recently, a museum was built in Santiago dedicated to remembering the disappeared called the Museum of Memory and Human Rights (El museo de la memoria y derechos humanos). Also, the once infamous Villa Grimaldi has now been turned into a park and memorial site called "Parque por la paz", or Peace Park. As stated in the article "Chile's Tortured 'Sitios de Memoria'", Villa Grimaldi "stands as a remembrance of what the torturers

did” and “the current democratic government has fulfilled an obligation to commemorate the memory of the victims of the military regime”<sup>34</sup>. These memorial sites are maintained by the women and help to keep the memory alive and remind the world of the atrocities that occurred in the country and the injustices the women have been fighting against for the last four decades.

Though political views of Pinochet differ among the Chilean population, the country has recognized the Pinochet dictatorship and the occurrences of human rights violations during it. Many have mixed feelings on Pinochet. Some see him as a brutal dictator who committed horrific human rights violations and whose massive privatization did long run damage to the economy while others credit him for Chile’s flourishing state in the years following his dictatorship. However, the government includes the time period in their education system and the advocacy of human rights remains an active priority in the society.

### Today

Because of the conservative policies enforced by Pinochet and the junta, the struggles for justice and human rights remained mostly an internal struggle. Also, smaller groups and organizations were formed to fight against the dictatorship instead of a few large groups which did not provide overwhelming power to one group. However, the Chilean women were able to give themselves voices and their efforts called attention to their cause with the formation of their organizations such as the AFDD.

Today, many of the organizations formed during the dictatorship no longer exist. The AFDD does still exist and although its membership has dwindled, the women still active in the organization work with Amnesty International in its continued investigations. Quoted in

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<sup>34</sup> Teresa Meade, “Holding the Junta Accountable: Chiles ‘Sitios de Memoria’ and the History of Torture, Disappearance, and Death”, *Radical History Review* (2001), 193-194.

Amnesty International's report, *Transition at the Crossroads: Human Rights Violations under Pinochet Remain the Crux*, the AFDD states the following on their continued efforts,

“Our position on the problems of human rights violations is basically legal, ethical and preventative. No healthy, solid, stable democracy can build itself upon a foundation of forgetting the most serious crimes against the right to life, integrity and freedom committed in Chilean history and within a policy of state terrorism that unleashed maximum political violence against society. We reaffirm that there is no ethical nor judicial reason why crimes of human rights violations should remain in impunity. We are asking that crimes against humanity be punished in the same way that common ones are”<sup>35</sup>.

Those guilty of being involved in the human rights violations are being tried and finally facing the consequences for their actions. Support groups, consisting of many exiles, exist in Europe and the United States. These groups remain in contact with organizations like the AFDD to keep their efforts alive. Because of the ongoing efforts of groups like the women in Chile, human rights investigations continue in Chile and the spread of awareness of such violations has globally raised awareness of human rights. As it will become evident in the following chapter, the efforts of the women in Chile ignited inspiration to women all over the world, including the women in Argentina whose efforts during the dictatorship known as the Dirty War helped to bring justice for their own disappeared.

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<sup>35</sup> Amnesty International, *Transition at the Crossroads: Human Rights Violations under Pinochet Remain the Crux* (1996).

### Chapter Three: The Argentine Women Come Together

Similarly to the Chilean women, many mothers in Argentina were robbed of their identities as women and mothers under the military junta. They were unable to fulfill their role of motherhood and as a result, organized themselves into a social movement calling for justice for their disappeared children. The following chapter discusses the historical factors that contributed to their formation and the obstacles they had to overcome to gain awareness and attention to their cause.

#### Overview

Argentina gained democracy in 1983 after undergoing the brutal rule of a military dictatorship. Between 1976 and 1983, Argentina was ruled by a military junta established by General Rafael Videla, Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera, and General Orlando Agosti. As a part of Operation Condor, they established a dictatorship they called the National Reorganization Process, which they saw as a “cleansing” of the nation. As previously stated, the proper term to refer to this time period is controversial but it is often referred to as the “Dirty War” or “El Proceso”. For seven years, thousands of forced disappearances or the threat of disappearances paralyzed the nation of Argentina. The junta leaders chose to disappear and kill citizens that posed a threat to the stability and order of the nation rather than legally arresting and putting individuals to trials. The targeted individuals consisted mostly of intellectuals including college students, professors, members of groups fighting against the government such as the Montoneros, unionists, journalists, and sympathizers. In a sense, the junta was attempting to wipe out an entire generation of intellects. Though the exact number of victims is not known, it is estimated that between 9,000 and 30,000 people disappeared during the Dirty War.

The disappeared individuals were brought to several different locations established as detainment centers where they were subjected to ruthless torture. These torture centers were the last places they were alive. The whereabouts of the disappeared were unknown because the government refused to recognize their disappearances and denied having any role in them. Just as seen under Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile, many bodies of the disappeared were never found, therefore it was impossible to demand an investigation or court case. Family members of the disappeared began to search for answers on their own by going to different locations, such as police stations, prisons, churches, and judicial buildings. The family members looking for their disappeared loved ones consisted of mainly mothers. This is because Argentina, during this time in history, was a very patriarchal society. Therefore, women stayed in their homes and did not have an active role in society other than maintaining their household and raising their children. As stated in *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, by Marguerite Guzman Bouvard,

“In Argentine society, home and family form the pivot of a woman's life. Those Mothers who worked outside the home had jobs in sectors traditionally reserved for women, such as primary- school education, clerical work, and social services”<sup>36</sup>.

Soon, mothers began to realize that they were not the only ones looking for their disappeared children. As more and more mothers realized this, they began to establish a network between them in hope of finding answers in the power of numbers. As the number of mothers grew, they joined together into the organization now known as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. In 1977, they began to meet every Thursday in the Plaza de Mayo, across the street from the Casa Rosada, the center of government, to demand justice and answers to the disappearances. They marched in silence around the Plaza holding large signs of photographs of their children.

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<sup>36</sup> Bouvard, 66.

They also began to wear white handkerchiefs that had the name of their child and the date they disappeared sewn onto it. These handkerchiefs have become a recognized symbol of their organization. By doing this, they exposed the reality that was being kept hidden by the government. Through years of this effort, the Mothers' organization and social movement has changed the role of women in Argentina and has influenced women around the world to stand up for justice.

### Historical Political Turmoil

Argentina historically has been a politically very unstable country, as seen with many Latin American countries. In 1946, Juan Perón became President of Argentina. President Perón's advocacy and use of Peronism, though supported by the working class that made up the majority of the population, was a source of controversy. It was associated with having Fascist tendencies, especially because of Perón's open admiration for Benito Mussolini. Peronism enjoyed an on-off relationship with the left. Though he was publically a leftist, he was known to form close relationships with the right and armed forces. Perón also went back and forth within the Peronist spectrum between the left and right. In 1955, Perón was overthrown in a coup d'état led by anti-Peronist General Pedro Eugenio Aramburu and lived in exile for eighteen years in Spain. Before his return in 1973, anything associated with Perón and Peronism was banned in a decree placed by Aramburu in 1963.

However, Perón was re-elected President of Argentina in 1973 after his return from exile in Spain. He died in July of 1974 and his third wife who was also the Vice President at the time, Isabel Martinez de Perón, became President of Argentina. For the next two years, there was political unrest in the country. Gradually, Isabel's popularity as President declined. On March

24, 1976, she was overthrown in a military coup. Her presidency became a symbol of the extent of women's political power in Argentina. Her short, unpopular presidency reinforced the idea that women should abide by traditional gender roles. As Diana Taylor argues, the junta "signaled that women's increased participation in the social arena was perceived as a serious threat to government control" and therefore, "women were confined to more traditional roles"<sup>37</sup>. This, therefore, demonstrates the boldness the Mothers had to give themselves a political voice in a society that had muted them only a few years earlier.

### The Role of Motherhood

The mothers making up the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo initially did not intend to become such a well-known social movement. They were simply mothers looking for their children and seeking answers to their many questions. Initially, their individual efforts to obtain information regarding their children were ignored. They realized if they joined forces they would have more of a voice and hopefully have a better chance of succeeding. This is what made the mothers' social movement different and unique from any other movement; they were the first to publicly voice their demands. They defied their gendered roles in society and gave themselves a political voice. As Marguerite Guzman Bouvard explains in *Revolutionizing Motherhood*,

"The Mothers progressively claimed space within a closed and male-dominated society. These women came out of the shadows, out of a cultural, historical, and social invisibility and into the center of the political arena to challenge a repressive government"<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Taylor, 57.

<sup>38</sup> Bouvard, 60.

The idea of motherhood became a driving force behind the Mothers' efforts. While defying the government by taking to the streets to protest, the mothers at the same time expanded their traditional roles by taking them out of their homes and into the public. In this sense, they were able to socialize and politicize motherhood within the patriarchal society.

Further, they turned motherhood into a performance, and in turn, gained political power. Diana Taylor argues this in the essay "Trapped in Bad Scripts: The Mothers of the Plaza of Mayo"<sup>39</sup>. Through their activism, the Mothers became a national spectacle that broke the nation's silence. She states,

“...the Madres, a group of nonpolitical women, organized one of the most visible and original resistance movements to a brutal dictatorship in the twentieth century. Theirs was very much a performance, designed to focus national and international attention on the junta's violation of human rights. The terrifying scenario in which the Madres felt compelled to insert themselves was organized and maintained around a highly coercive definition of the feminine and motherhood which the women simultaneously exploited and attempted to subvert”<sup>40</sup>.

The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo were able to take the traditional roles of motherhood and use them to their greatest advantage.

### Gaining Internal Recognition

The upper class and political rightists of Argentina supported the military junta. The Catholic Church, a very large and powerful institution in many Latin American countries, including Argentina, also supported the military junta. Though the role of the Catholic Church during the Dirty War will be discussed in depth in the subsequent chapters, it is significant to note that many members of the Catholic Church turned their backs on the Mothers when they

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<sup>39</sup> Taylor, 183.

<sup>40</sup> Taylor, 184.

went to them for help. The Mothers, therefore, had no significant institution to turn to for help and support.

Many Argentines lived their daily lives as if they knew nothing of the atrocities occurring in their own country to their own people. Many believed that those who were disappeared had done something to deserve it. Others informed the government of subversives while others did not realize the extent of the disappearances and human rights violations. Many who did not support the junta were too afraid to speak out against it in fear of becoming disappeared themselves.

Disappearances occurred throughout the day and night and were strategically planned in public settings to evoke fear. In response, popular public places were avoided and became desolate because of fear. The military had police patrols to maintain their constant presence. Being at the wrong place at the wrong time could mean becoming disappeared. Therefore, when the Mothers began to protest in silence around the Plaza de Mayo, they drew public attention. Even then, there were other mothers going through the same situation that wanted to join but were hesitant to do so because of the risk it involved. As their membership continued to grow, the Mothers began vocal protests, which drew even more attention. Through the act of marching in a public area, the Mothers defied their government and exposed many to the disgusting reality plaguing their country. As stated in Diana Taylor's essay "Military Males, 'Bad' Women, Dirty War", "The Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, like a Greek chorus, were a physical reminder of the personal and national dramas that violence conspired to erase from history"<sup>41</sup>. It was a very important step in gaining exposure on the national level since they were able to reveal the secrets

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<sup>41</sup> Taylor, 125.

their government desperately tried to keep unknown because the next step after awareness would be action. As stated by Marguerite Bouvard,

“Through the constant public chanting of their slogans they created a presence for themselves in the political arena, engaging in a dialogue that would simultaneously express their anguish as Mothers, expose the duplicity and dishonesty of the government, and create an ethical space in a country that seemed to have lost its conscience and its souls”<sup>42</sup>.

### The Disappearances of Mothers

The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo were aware of the dangers they faced by marching around the Plaza and publicly protesting against the government. Public demonstrations and protests were banned under the dictatorship. Initially, the government did not view the mothers as a threat. They referred to them as “Las Locas”, or the crazy women, to sway the opinions of the public. However, as their recognition and movement grew, the junta began to send military officials to the Plaza to observe their marches and evoke fear.

The Mothers faced an unexpected obstacle when members of their organization were disappeared. On December 8, 1977 Esther Careaga and María Eugenia Bianco, two of the original founding Mothers were kidnapped and disappeared while attending a meeting in a church<sup>43</sup>. Two days later another Mother, Azucena Villaflor de DeVincente, was kidnapped and disappeared. As one of the original founders of the organization, Azucena was a major driving force in their activism. Her disappearance, along with the disappearances of Careaga and Bianco, stunned the Mothers because the government had taken a step that they never foresaw.

As stated in *Revolutionizing Motherhood*,

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<sup>42</sup> Bouvard, 81.

<sup>43</sup> Ka Frank “*Argentina’s Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Keep Heat on Government to Prosecute Torturers*” Frontlines of Revolutionary Struggle, Oct 31, 2010, [http://revolutionaryfrontlines.wordpress.com/?s=argentina mothers](http://revolutionaryfrontlines.wordpress.com/?s=argentina%20mothers)

“The abduction of Azucena was a terrible blow to the Mothers. Though they had been harassed continually by police and security agents in the Plaza and had been followed to their homes, they had cherished an illusion that as middle-aged mothers they would never be arrested. ...People had been afraid to associate with the Mothers before; now it meant risking one’s life”<sup>44</sup>.

A decline in the membership of the Mothers occurred after the disappearances of the three women. However, though their disappearances hindered the expansion of their campaign among Argentina, they fueled international recognition that would draw attention to the human rights violations occurring.

Sister Leonie Duquet and Sister Alicia Doman, two French nuns assisting the Mothers in raising funds to run advertisements in a newspaper were also arrested with Azucena and were never seen again. This sparked an international outrage that led to an investigation by the United Nations<sup>45</sup>. Because there was large censorship under the dictatorship, the ability to gain international aid was hindered. Events such as these generated publicity needed to expose the atrocities occurring in Argentina.

### International Recognition

Many opportunities allowed the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo to gain international recognition. These opportunities played a large role in the success of the Mothers. As previously mentioned, the disappearance of the two French nuns became an event that drew foreign aid to the crisis in Argentina. Other opportunities arose in subsequent years. For example, an important opportunity arose in 1978 when Buenos Aires hosted the World Cup. Though the government went to great measures to hide what was occurring in Argentina to the rest of the world, some Mothers were able to speak with journalists that had come to cover the

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<sup>44</sup> Bouvard, 78.

<sup>45</sup> Bouvard, 77.

World Cup. The World Cup opened a small gateway for the Mothers to send their pleas to the rest of the world. As stated in *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, “The inner circle of the Mothers’ organization knew that the country would soon be filled with tourists and the media, and that they needed to gain access to them”<sup>46</sup>. Whenever a journalist asked a question, they all stated “We want our children. They must tell us where they are”<sup>47</sup>. Additionally, the Mothers also sent cards to hundreds of foreign political leaders and television networks in hopes of spreading their cause<sup>48</sup>. A Netherlands reporting crew videotaped the Mothers marching instead of the soccer game and an American journalist whose tape recorder was taken away by a military official complained to the American embassy<sup>49</sup>. Through small incidents such as these, the Mothers were slowly gaining international recognition and support.

Lisbeth Den Uyl, the wife of Netherland’s Prime Minister, created the Support Group for the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina in 1977<sup>50</sup>. After this achievement, the Mothers visited Washington DC and New York City where they met with journalists and human rights groups in 1978. The Mothers also attempted to meet with the Pope in Italy. He refused to meet with them because just as the Catholic Church in Argentina did, he too supported the junta because they advocated Catholicism. Although they were denied any time with him, the response made headlines around the world.

During the same year, the International Conference on Cancer Research took place in Buenos Aires. The Mothers took advantage of this opportunity by speaking to doctors and attendees from several different countries. Many Mothers also remained in contact with

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<sup>46</sup> Bouvard, 81.

<sup>47</sup> Bouvard, 81.

<sup>48</sup> Bouvard, 81.

<sup>49</sup> Bouvard, 83.

<sup>50</sup> Bouvard, 86.

Argentine political exiles in different European countries that made efforts to help them in seeking justice from abroad<sup>51</sup>.

With the election of President Carter in 1977, a change in US policy shifted. Under President Carter, the State Department had to issue human rights reports on all governments receiving US security aid<sup>52</sup>. In 1977, Patricia Derian was appointed to travel to Argentina to meet with the junta. On all three of her visits, her reports were full of outrage of what she saw, which only continued to draw more positive attention to the Mothers' cause. Amnesty International and several other human rights groups began investigations in Argentina, but those will be expanded on in further chapters.

Popular culture played a large role in revealing and maintaining the efforts of the Mothers. In 1983, the organization MADRE was established in the United States to promote rights, resources and results for women worldwide<sup>53</sup> (footnote <http://www.madre.org/index.php>). Campaigns were nationwide and included celebrity advocates such as the actress Susan Sarandon, who appeared in advertisements and commercials. Naturally, one of the first campaigns MADRE advocated was the support of the Mothers in Argentina. In 1987, the famous rock band U2 wrote a song called the "Mothers of the Disappeared". Although it was based on mothers in El Salvador who also were seeking answers and justice for their disappeared loved ones, it became associated with the mothers of Argentina and Chile as well. Another song on the same subject was written by folksinger Holly Near called "Hay Una Mujer Desaparecida". It was not only widely popular in Chile and Argentina but also became well known in North America. In 1988, two years after the return of democracy in Argentina, Amnesty International

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<sup>51</sup> Bouvard, 83.

<sup>52</sup> Bouvard, 86.

<sup>53</sup> MADRE: Demanding Rights, Resources & Results for Women Worldwide, <http://www.madre.org>.

held a benefit concert in Buenos Aires. The enormously famous singer Sting wrote and performed a song called “They Dance Alone”.

Throughout the years, the Mothers were able to expand and maintain a network of connections around the world. This ignited further international recognition that exposed their fight for justice and human rights violations in their country. The voices of their disappeared children they struggled and fought to keep alive were now heard and kept alive by people all over the world.

### The Division

Strife outside and tension inside of the organization resulted in a split of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in 1986. The organization split into the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo- Linea Fundadora (Founding Line) and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Association. The split occurred because members disagreed on the goals of the organization. The dozen mothers that made up the Founding Line did not support Hebe de Bonafini’s leadership. Bonafini began participating in the formation of the Mothers when her two sons, Jorge and Raúl, and then pregnant daughter in-law, María Elena, were disappeared. She became a very active figure in the organization and was chosen as president of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo after the disappearance of Azucena de Villaflor de De Vicente<sup>54</sup>. However, the mothers in the Founding Line found her to be too “combative” and disagreed with her opposition of exhumations and creation of memorial sites<sup>55</sup>. By splitting, the mothers of the Founding Line “intended to work within the political system as an interest group rather than as a radical opposition group that

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<sup>54</sup> Bouvard, 100.

<sup>55</sup> Taylor, 163.

continued demonstrating and marching against the government”<sup>56</sup>. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Association focused on more political goals such as getting the government to admit to their role in the disappearances and continues to be led by Hebe de Bonafini today.

Hebe de Bonafini has not only been a controversial figure within the Mothers’ organizations but has internationally called attention to herself with her outspokenness. Though her remarks are contentious, they still draw attention to her cause and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. She has been infamously quoted in defending the hijackers in the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks against the United States in 2001 because she places blame on them for supporting, funding and allowing the junta to reign over Argentina. Also, following the death of Pope John Paul II in 2005, de Bonafini controversially stated that he had committed many sins and would be going to hell because she feels the same way about the Catholic Church as she does with the role the United States played in the human rights violations<sup>57</sup> (<http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2005/04/13/elpais/p-01001.htm>). Though with these remarks she has gained negative attention, she has gained international attention and continued awareness of the atrocities that occurred in Argentina during the Dirty War.

### The Abuelas and Hijos

Two organizations that sprang from the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo are the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice Against Forgetting and Silence, also known as HIJOS. The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, founded in 1977, seeks to identify their grandchildren that were kidnapped with their parents or born while their mothers were detained and given away to military families or put up for adoption.

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<sup>56</sup> Taylor, 163.

<sup>57</sup> “Bonafini Cargo Duro Contra las Abuelas”, Clarin.com, April 13, 2005 (<http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2005/04/13/elpais/p-01001.htm>).

Because of advances in DNA testing, the Grandmothers have been able to identify 87 grandchildren<sup>58</sup>.

“The Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice Against Forgetting and Silence” was founded in 1995. It is an organization of the children of the disappeared who fight to keep the memory of their disappeared parents alive. Together, these two organizations help to keep the legacy and activism of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in the public eye. Both groups do so by participating in the Mothers’ marches as well as holding their own exhibits, lectures and working with similar organizations.

### Today

Though they did not intend to start a political and social movement, especially to the great extent and influence their group achieved, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo changed the role of women in Argentina and influenced women around the world to stand up for justice. Many Mothers have passed away but their continued efforts on behalf of their children are still carried on through the work they dedicated their lifetimes to. Though most of the Mothers do not know the exact facts of their children, they continue to march around the Plaza de Mayo every Thursday to remind the world of this injustice. The difference between the marches today and those thirty years ago is that the Mothers are joined by several other people, including members of other organizations, supporters, and tourists.

The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo also have an established library and bookstore which have significantly contributed to keeping their accomplishments and cause known. They, along with several human rights organizations, continue their demands for justice. What began with fourteen women looking for answers to the disappearances of their children turned into a social

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<sup>58</sup> Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo, <http://www.abuelas.org.ar/english/history.htm>.

and political movement that changed the role of women and motherhood that has inspired movements across the globe.

## Chapter 4: Social and Political Influences on the Women's Movement

### Feminism and Motherhood in Latin America

As stated in the previous chapters, the formation of the women's organizations in Chile and Argentina were a response to the disappearances of their loved ones. The authoritative government took away their ability to fulfill their roles as women and mothers. Since their lives centered on fulfilling these roles in their societies, the women were driven to break into the political sphere and publically protest. In a historic context, it is important to note how the role feminism and the idea of motherhood in Latin America drove and affected these movements.

The role of motherhood in Latin American can be linked to the stems of the activism by the women in Chile and Argentina. Historically, the rise of feminism began in the late nineteenth century into the early twentieth century in Latin America. Feminism empowered women to be more active in their societies as it did in Europe at the same time. However, at the same time, the role of women became idealized in the macho and patriarchal societies of Latin America. Women were expected to fulfill their maternal roles of bearing children, taking care of their family and taking care of their home. The combination of feminism and the social roles of women made it possible for the women's organizations that began to form in the 1970s in Chile and Argentina to fight for justice and create a political voice for themselves.

An error the dictatorships made in Chile and Argentina was that they created a contradiction between state discourse and state actions. As Elizabeth Maier explains in *Women's Activism in Latin America and the Caribbean*, "while military authoritarian regimes extolled the virtues of nurturing motherhood and women's vital role in the care of their families and, indeed,

their nations, they disappeared loved family members”<sup>59</sup>. The regimes made it very difficult and virtually impossible for women to fulfill their idealized social roles. Therefore, the women turned to protest and political activism to try to gain it back. As stated by Victoria Gonzalez in *Radical Women in Latin America*,

“In the Latin American context, the feminine is cherished, the womanly- the ability to bear and raise children, to nurture a family-is celebrated. Rather than reject their socially defined roles as mothers, as wives, Latin American feminists may be understood as women acting to protest laws and conditions which threaten their ability to fulfill that role”<sup>60</sup>.

Some sources argue that the women’s responses to the disappearances in Chile and Argentina are not feminist movements but rather women’s activism in general. In the essay, “Feminist activism in Latin America”, Julie Shayne argues that the women of Chile and Argentina are not feminists because not all women who are socially and politically active are considered so. However, she argues the organizations formed in response to the disappearances “did offer a model for women’s mobilization that in some cases was mimicked by feminist organizations”<sup>61</sup>. Therefore, the Chilean women and the Argentinian mothers can arguably be said to have embraced both feminist and maternal ideals. In *Radical Women in Latin America*, Victoria González supports this further by stating,

“It is not surprising that Southern Cone feminists opted for a feminism that would fit into their social milieu and be acceptable to other women as well as to the men who held the reins of power”<sup>62</sup>.

For both groups of women in Chile and Argentina, the socialized idea of motherhood and the increase in feminism over the last century helped the women to organize and justify their

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<sup>59</sup> Nathalie Lebon, Elizabeth Maier, *Women’s Activism in Latin America and the Caribbean: Engendering Social Justice, Democratizing Citizenship* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2010), 7.

<sup>60</sup> Victoria González and Karen Kampwirth, *Radical Women in Latin America: Left and Right* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2001), 23.

<sup>61</sup> Julie Shayne, “Feminist Activism in Latin America”, in *Feminist Anthropology*, 1685-1689.

<sup>62</sup> González and Kampwirth, 23.

causes. They revolutionized what it meant to be a woman and mother in a patriarchal society and used their own societies' ideals to work against the repression. However, there were also many other forces that affected the success and accomplishments of the women. These include negative factors working against the women that made their goals more difficult to achieve as well as positive factors that supported their movements and made the goals of their causes attainable.

### Internal Political Influences

The political state in both Chile and Argentina perceptibly hindered the women's movements. Both governments took actions to prevent protest, revolution, and trials from occurring. For years, both dictatorships denied having any involvement in the disappearances and failed to recognize them in general. In Chile, soon after the 1973 coup, the four men who made up the junta, General Augusto Pinochet, General Gustavo Leigh Guzmán, Admiral José Toribio Merino Castro and General Director César Mendoza Durán all became the new executive and legislative authority<sup>63</sup>. Under the new authority, laws were terminated, changed and ratified to benefit themselves. The junta privileged the Supreme Court by giving benefits to the judges in return for their support so that their actions would not be questioned. Those involved in law and government who did not support the junta and their actions were often too frightened to speak out against the junta's actions or followed their orders in fear of losing their jobs or becoming disappeared. Soon, the judicial, legislative and executive branches were all compliant with the junta. As stated in *A Nation of Enemies: Chile Under Pinochet*,

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<sup>63</sup> Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela, *A Nation of Enemies: Chile under Pinochet* (New York:Norton, 1993), 117.

“With a handful of exceptions, judges turned a blind eye to abuses by security forces and docilely collaborated as the law was transformed from a shield for individual rights into a weapon of persecution. Evidence of kidnapping and torture at the hands of police agents or rightist vigilantes was summarily rejected, while officials’ versions of events were accepted with question”<sup>64</sup>.

General Pinochet had a copy of the book *The Art of War* by Sun-tzu. In it, the following passage was underlined; “Those who excel in the art of war cultivate above all their own justice, and protect their laws and institutions. In that form they make their government invincible”. This is exactly what was achieved; the junta made it impossible for any opposition to take place and were able to give themselves absolute power over all of Chile.

Without evidence of the disappearances, crimes, and human rights violations, it was impossible to request a trial or even file a missing person’s report. When they were asked by family members for any information concerning the disappearance of a loved one, many police officers and military officials made up excuses, such as that the only explanation for the disappearance of someone’s husband was that he must have run off with another woman. This was the case for Gabriela Zuñiga when she began to ask questions after her husband disappeared. At only twenty three years old, her husband, Alvaro, whom she had been married to for a few years, suddenly disappeared one day in 1974. She was unable to file a missing persons report and until this day, she does not know what happened to her husband or even why he was taken. Similar circumstances unfolded for many members of the Agrupación de Familiares Detenidos Desaparecidos (AFDD) and other women looking for their husbands, sons, brothers and other disappeared male family members.

In 1980, when Augusto Pinochet became the official dictator of Chile, he established a new constitution. What seemed like a legitimate constitution on the surface was a document that

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<sup>64</sup> Constable and Valenzuela, 122.

consisted of many vague clauses and transitional articles that gave the government very flexible authority. Such power included the right to detain and imprison citizens without a charge or to eradicate what the Constitution stated in circumstances when there was a “danger of disturbance to internal peace”<sup>65</sup>. The government also had the power to permanently exile someone believed to hold Marxist views<sup>66</sup>. Though the government did not directly ban public protesting, any form of protest was quickly repressed by authorities. Many leaders of these protests, consisting mostly of university students and scholars, were beaten, arrested, and/or disappeared. This led to fear and streets were often found to be desolate. This fear factor affected the women because it caused them to be hesitant in their pursuit to find answers concerning the disappeared.

In Argentina, with the implementation of El Proceso de Reorganización Nacional (The Process of National Reorganization) in 1976, the new junta dictatorship quickly dismantled any institutions that posed any opposition and suspended the constitution (Wright, 100). General Rafael Videla, Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera, and General Orlando Agosti seized power and control over the entire country with the goal to restore it back to the flourishing Argentina they imagined before Juan Perón was President. They stated that they would take any measures to achieve their goal which included, in the words of General Videla, that “As many persons as necessary will have to die to achieve the country’s security”<sup>67</sup>. War on subversives was declared and kidnappings and disappearances became an everyday occurrence. State terrorism was so effective that “initially no institutions opposed it, and society at large feared, denied, and even justified it” which made the Mothers’ mission to expose the atrocities occurring difficult since

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<sup>65</sup> Constable and Valenzuela, 137.

<sup>66</sup> Constable and Valenzuela, 138.

<sup>67</sup> Wright, 101.

the support of the Argentine society was dismal<sup>68</sup>. This was so because part of the population turned a blind eye to what was happening while another part supported the junta's actions. Further, the government denied having anything to do with the disappearances and did not record the kidnapped as detained, therefore not only could the authorities not be held responsible for the disappearances, but missing person's reports could not be filed. This became another obstacle for the Mothers because they were denied the fact that their children were disappeared.

### External Political Influences

Not only did the women of Chile and Argentina encounter obstacles that worked against them and made their efforts more difficult within their own countries, but there were also forces working against the women from the outside. The United States played a large role in both coups. Before the coup in Chile, the United States had been observing the rise of Allende and tried to sabotage his campaigns and the election to prevent him from becoming President in their fight against the spread of communism. When that failed, under the orders of President Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the CIA worked with Chilean military officials, including Pinochet, in devising the siege on the Moneda Palace and the fall of President Allende.

Files and reports in the National Security Archive that expose the United States' intervention in Chile became declassified under the Presidency of Bill Clinton. Thousands of reports admitted the role the United States had in grossly funding the coup and dictatorship. One such document, released by the CIA in 2000 called "CIA Activities in Chile", states that many of

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<sup>68</sup> Wright, 115.

Pinochet's officers became paid contacts of the US military or the CIA although many of these officers were known for torturing and committing human rights abuses<sup>69</sup>.

The pages of evidence indicates that the United States had the same goal as Pinochet and the rest of the junta; to take whatever measures possible to prevent opposition and the spread of communism. The United States was aware of what they were taking part of and censored the details from the American population in order to continue supporting the intervention in Chile without causing controversy because American tax dollars were funding the School of the Americas, where Latin American officials were trained by the United States Department of Defense, many of whom moved on to become infamous torturers and violators of human rights, and weaponry<sup>70</sup>. By keeping their actions under the radar from the American population, any possibility of aid and support from Americans in protesting against the dictatorship and supporting the women's efforts was unable to become a reality. The fact that the leaders of one of the most powerful countries in the world had the ability to stop the violation of human rights and expose them to the world but instead chose to partake in them shows the impediment it created for Chileans crying out against the repression.

Another example that exemplifies how the United States negatively influenced the efforts to expose the truth, other than the fact that they were trying to hide it themselves, was their role in the death of an American citizen during the dictatorship. Charles Horman, an American journalist whose story is depicted in the Oscar winning film *Missing*, was arrested, detained and killed days after the 1973 coup. It is believed that he became a victim because he had been discovered the complicity of the United States had with the coup. Henry Kissinger, in 1976,

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<sup>69</sup> National Security Archive, Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA Activities in Chile* (Washington, DC: 2002), (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/20000919/01-02.htm>).

<sup>70</sup> SOA Watch: Close the School of the Americas, *Notorious Graduates from Argentina*, [http://www.soaw.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=230](http://www.soaw.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=230).

wrote in a memo declassified in 1999, that "US intelligence may have played an unfortunate part in Horman's death"<sup>71</sup>. If the United States did nothing to protect one of its own citizens and possibly played a part in his death, then they most certainly would do nothing for the women searching for the disappeared. The support and role the United States played in Chile only aided Pinochet in his quest to repress the leftists and take drastic measures to prevent anyone from speaking out against them. As Peter Kornbluh, the director of the National Security Archive's Chile Documentation Project, states, the declassified documents and CIA reports expose the "27-year cover-up of Washington's covert ties to Pinochet's brutal dictatorship"<sup>72</sup>.

The role of the United States in Argentina was similar to that in Chile. In Argentina, Henry Kissinger approved of the junta's actions and the United States readily supplied them since the coup took place in 1976 when Cold War tensions were still high. Though they were aware of the atrocities occurring in Argentina, the U.S Embassy in Buenos Aires put very little pressure on the junta to give information about the whereabouts of the disappeared and did not try to punish or prosecute them for their actions. In Document 8 of the U.S. declassified documents "Argentine Junta Security Forces Killed, Disappeared Activists, Mothers and Nuns", the Ambassador of the United States, Raul Castro, stated,

"The one-issue groups, such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, will clamor for the government to make an accounting for the missing. The issue will be increasingly and dramatically reported internationally... [But] We should avoid... demanding accountability for the disappeared, since that does nothing directly to eliminate further abuses."<sup>73</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup> Bill Vann, "Declassified Documents Confirm US Role in 1973 Death of Charles Horman", World Socialist Website, October 26, 1999 (<http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/oct1999/horm-o26.shtml>).

<sup>72</sup> <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/20000919/01-02.htm>

<sup>73</sup> National Security Archives, "US Declassified Documents: Argentina Junta Security Forces Killed, Disappeared Activists, Mothers and Nuns" (Washington, DC, 2002), <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB77/>.

Though the United States did not play such a brutal and direct role in the disappearances in Argentina like they did in Chile, they were still aware of what was occurring under the junta and did very little to prevent it or take actions against it. As Ambassador Castro stated himself, if any actions were to be taken by the United States it would be actions to prevent groups like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo from exposing the truth and creating further problems that they would have to deal with. Instead of promoting what the United States advocates the most, democracy and justice, the United States chose not to interfere in the events playing out in Argentina and watched as tens of thousands of people were kidnapped, tortured and killed.

Finally in 1978, the United States began to take a proactive role in the actions of the junta in Argentina. Under the Carter administration, the U.S. Congress prohibited military sales, aid and loans to Argentina. On top of that, as stated by Thomas Wright in *State Terrorism in Latin America*, “the Carter administration consistently voted against Argentine requests for loans from international financial institutions”<sup>74</sup>. As stated in chapter three, Patricia Derian, the assistant secretary of state of human rights and humanitarian affairs, made several trips to Argentina to observe the condition it was in and reported negative feedback to President Carter. This sparked investigations by many different organizations on human rights violations. During the Presidency of Nixon, Senator Edward Kennedy promoted human rights in Chile and spoke out against the actions and involvement of Nixon, Kissinger, and the CIA. This too, along with Derian’s findings, generated international attention and exposure for the cries for justice from the women in Chile and Mothers in Argentina.

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<sup>74</sup>Wright, 123.

## Human Rights Investigations

At the end of both dictatorships, pressure from the United Nations, Amnesty International, and countries around the world led to investigations within Chile and Argentina. Commissions of Truth were created as a result because, as stated in the Chilean Museum of Human Rights and Memory in Santiago, the people “have the right to know the truth and publically recognize the suffering”. In Chile, three commissions emerged in the years following the end of the Pinochet dictatorship. The first was the Rettig Commission or the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation Report (Comisión nacional de verdad y reconciliación), that began in 1990 under the Presidency of Patricio Aylwin. Not only did the report submitted by the committee document evidence of human rights violations but also called on the state and society to recognize and take responsibility for the crimes committed during the dictatorship. This provided closure for many women whose family members had been classified as merely “disappeared” for seventeen years, which will be discussed in chapter six. Reparations were now able to be given to not only victims but also the families of victims who could not collect benefits before since the disappeared were not declared dead. This occurred through the second committee established, the National Corporation of Reparation and Reconciliation (Corporación nacional de reparación y reconciliación) that began in 1992 and lasted through 1996.

Beginning in 2003, the Valech Report, also known as the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report, also began to investigate abuses and human rights violations. With its findings, President Ricardo Lagos proposed a bill that, similar to the result of the Rettig Commission, would provide compensation to victims of the dictatorship. Recently, in February of 2010, the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture announced

that they would be accepting new cases so that more victims could qualify for compensation and benefits<sup>75</sup>.

The National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas, or CONADEP) was established to investigate human rights abuses that occurred between 1976 and 1983 in Argentina. The organization was created by President Raúl Alfonsín shortly after he won the presidential election in 1983. A year later, all of the findings were published in a report called *Nunca más* (Never Again). Included were testimonies of victims and many Mothers of the disappeared. The information led to the first trials against the military officials and persons that participated in the human rights abuses. After seven years, the steps to justice and information about what had happened to their children began to become a reality for the Mothers who had persistently tried to have their voices heard over so many forces trying to silence them.

### Outcomes of Influences

The roles of women in the patriarchal societies of Chile and Argentina led to an idealized vision of what the role of a woman and mother should be in society. The dictatorships stripped the women of their duties and as a result, sparked protest from them in hopes of getting them back. In order to regain what they had lost as women and mothers, the women of Chile and Argentina had to face many obstacles. Forces from within their respective countries created fearful environments where people were initially hesitant to protest and all evidence of disappearances were destroyed and denied. Support of the dictatorships from the United States only empowered repressors more and further silenced the protestors, including the women.

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<sup>75</sup> Loretta Van Der Horst, "Valech Commission Accepts New Human Rights Case", *Santiago Times*, Feb 18, 2010 ([http://www.santiagotimes.cl/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=18280:valech-commission-accepts-new-human-rights-case&catid=43:human-rights&Itemid=39](http://www.santiagotimes.cl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18280:valech-commission-accepts-new-human-rights-case&catid=43:human-rights&Itemid=39)).

However, with their persistent demand for justice and answers, the women of Chile and Mothers of Argentina had their voices heard and the atrocities committed in their nations by their very own leaders became exposed to the world. Since then, actions have been taken to investigate the violations in both countries, provide answers for the families of the disappeared, and provide reparations for the victims. Though many obstacles stood in the women's way and there were many forces working against them, with some support from others and their will to continue fighting and refusal to back down, they were able to achieve some justice in the wake of two of the most brutal dictatorships in the twentieth century.

## Chapter 5: Role of the Catholic Church

### The Catholic Church in Latin America

As seen in the previous chapter, there were many different institutions and factors that affected the women's movements in Chile and Argentina. One institution that was not discussed but played a very large role in both is the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has always played a large role in Latin American history since the majority of Latin America's population follows Catholicism. However, its role has varied in different countries and situations. In some circumstances, the Catholic Church has been seen to support the left, while in others, it supports the right. In these specific instances, the Catholic Church supported the left in Chile and the right in Argentina. Therefore, the role the Catholic Church played in Chile aided the Chilean women in their movement for justice while the Catholic Church worked against the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina.

### The Catholic Church in Chile under Pinochet

When the Chilean women began searching for their disappeared loved ones, like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, they began to bump into each other at different locations searching for answers. Through recognition and the common situation they shared, friendships were formed. To make their efforts stronger, common meeting places were established. As a result, the Comité Pro-Paz (Committee for Peace) was created by a coalition of religious denominations including the Catholic, Jewish and Lutheran denominations<sup>76</sup>. The Committee for Peace became a place where women could share their stories and any information they had gained that could possibly help other women in their personal struggles. Similar organizations formed after the Committee for Peace, such as the Association of Relatives of the Disappeared

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<sup>76</sup> Kaplan, 75.

(AFDD) which became one of the biggest advocates for human rights in Chile. However, in his quest to repress any opposition, Pinochet had the Committee for Peace dissolved in 1975<sup>77</sup>.

In 1976, as a result of the termination of the Committee for Peace, Raúl Silva Henríquez, the cardinal archbishop of Santiago, created the Vicaría de Solidaridad (Vicariate of Solidarity). This organization was founded by the Catholic Church and therefore only had to answer to the Pope and no other institutions, including the government. It became a safe haven for victims and those searching for victims of the dictatorship. Church officials worked to end human rights violations and repression by the government through the organization. Lawyers became available through the Vicariate and many filed cases of habeas corpus on behalf of the women to the Supreme Court although most were denied or declared “political harassment” by judges. This was because many judges either supported the dictatorship or feared becoming a victim themselves. In a ten year span, between 1973 and 1983, only 10 of 5,400 habeas corpus petitions submitted by Vicariate lawyers were not rejected by the Supreme Court<sup>78</sup>.

The Vicariate of Solidarity offered other support such as soup kitchens since many families lost their sole financial supporter and were unable to support themselves because of their disappearance. Medical aid was also provided to those who needed it and childcare became available to women who had to work to provide for their families. Job opportunities were also available through the Vicariate as well as other means of income. Such other means included arpillera workshops. Women learned to sew tapestries through the funded workshops by the

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<sup>77</sup> Kaplan, 75.

<sup>78</sup> Constable and Valenzuela, 122.

Catholic Church which provided them with not only a form of grieving, but also a way to earn an income. The tapestries sewn by the women were bought by the Vicariate and sold nationally and internationally in efforts to expose the atrocities occurring in Chile.

#### Support with the Arpillera movement

The Catholic Church was imperative in the distribution of the arpilleras that led to international exposure of the atrocities occurring in Chile. Tapestries were sold abroad to different countries such as the United States, European countries and Canada. They were circulated throughout the world and began to gain international recognition that in turn, gained them international support. The tapestries were displayed in churches, museums, universities and other public places. Many were sold once again and the proceeds were sent to the Vicariate in Chile to continue funding the workshops. The tapestries became a form of political protest, a form of testimony and an artistic expression for the Chilean women. The workshops continued to be funded by the Catholic Church until 1992, at the end of Pinochet's dictatorship.

Other organizations in Chile not associated with the Catholic Church began to circulate the arpilleras nationally and internationally as well. One group in particular was Mujeres por la Vida (Women for Life). This small group of women, consisting of seventeen members, opposed Pinochet's dictatorship and called for social equality. They smuggled arpilleras while they travelled abroad, as many Chileans did to seek exile and escape repression, and raised money for public relief<sup>79</sup>.

#### Further Support by the Catholic Church

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<sup>79</sup> Kaplan, 74.

The Vicariate of Solidarity became known as one of the most effective human rights organizations in Latin America. However, they were not the only organization that provided aid and made a positive impact on the struggles of the Chilean women affected by the dictatorship. Through the Catholic Church, hundreds of other groups were formed during the dictatorship to offer support and to fight the repression. The Catholic Church also supported other groups that were not formed through them. Such organizations include the Pastoral Workers' Vicariate and the Academy of Christian Humanism<sup>80</sup>. Through the efforts and support of the Catholic Church in Chile, citizens were able to create networks between them to make their causes stronger and to work against the repressive authority. Internally, the Catholic Church created a very strong support system and provided a strong ally against Pinochet which played a great role in exposing the women's movements and having their voices heard around the world. Though many of the organizations were small, together, they were able to create an opposition that brought international attention on the human rights violations occurring in Chile which could not have been achieved without the support from the Catholic Church. As stated by Thomas Wright in *State Terrorism in Latin America*,

“The key internal element in the [Chilean] dictatorship was the Catholic Church-the one institution that Pinochet was unable to neutralize. By providing support to other human rights organizations, the church helped build a human rights movement in Chile that complemented and worked with international organizations”<sup>81</sup>.

The Catholic Church was the one institution that could be relied on by the women of Chile and others affected by the dictatorship. The Church became a strong enemy to the Pinochet dictatorship because of the power they held and the support they gave the people the government was trying to repress and excise. The most powerful organization created by the

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<sup>80</sup> Constable and Valenzuela, 240.

<sup>81</sup> Wright, 226.

Catholic Church was the Vicariate of Solidarity because their efforts not only helped victims and families of the disappeared, but the efforts by their lawyers later helped in the quest for justice.

Thomas Wright rightfully states,

“...the paper trial of court documents filed by the Vicaría de la Solidaridad and other human rights lawyers would be invaluable to establishing the truth of what happened between 1973 and 1990 and to the eventual pursuit of justice”<sup>82</sup>.

### The Catholic Church during the Dirty War

Unlike in Chile, the Catholic Church in Argentina supported the military dictatorship and turned their backs on groups like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo during the Dirty War. When the junta assumed power after the 1973 coup, they identified themselves with the Catholic Church in order to “restore” societal roles. Also, patriotism and Catholicism paralleled one another. Argued in the essay “Military Males, ‘Bad’ Women, and a Dirty, Dirty War”, the junta put on a performance to set an example to the rest of Argentina by associating themselves with certain values, one of which was Catholicism. As stated,

“Opposed to the interiority associated with subversion, the military represented itself as all surface; unequivocally masculine, aggressively visible, identifiable by their uniforms, ubiquitous, on parade for all the world to see...The ‘restored’ nature of the performance suggested that order itself had been restored. The military display acted, enacted, and reenacted the (new-now more than ever-always) social system: all male, Catholic, and strictly hierarchical”<sup>83</sup>.

Therefore, the junta associated itself with the Catholic Church which established the relation they had and the stance the Catholic Church took during the Dirty War. As stated by Susan Eckstein in *Power and Popular Protest*, the Catholic Church in Argentina never disassociated itself from the junta. She states, “The absence of mediating institutions or mechanisms was underscored by

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<sup>82</sup> Wright, 226.

<sup>83</sup> Taylor, 67.

the ambiguous role of the Catholic Church...” and the Catholic Church “did not become the voice of moral opposition to the military regime”<sup>84</sup>. Many members of the Catholic Church worked with the junta to suppress those they declared to be subversive and worked against the Mothers although many of them practiced Catholicism.

As stated, many members of the Catholic Church turned their backs on the Mothers. The Mothers trusted their priests and initially did not find it plausible that they would betray them and be informants. When the Mothers first sought aid from the priests, most of them simply turned their backs on them and told them to pray. This is confirmed by Hebe de Bonafini in *Revolutionizing Motherhood* when she states her personal experience with the Church and states in her own words that, “The church imposes silence on you and tells you to keep your pain and pray”<sup>85</sup>.

After speaking with some Mothers in Argentina, it became clear that what frustrated the Mothers the most about the Catholic Church was that they had enough power to stop the inhumane events occurring but they instead chose to sit on the sidelines and ignore the situation. Though some members of the Catholic Church went against the majority and tried to help the Mothers when they sought them for support, those who did not participate or fully advocate the junta ignored their pleas. An example of this is the Argentina Council of Bishops, a group known for ignoring the pleas of the Mothers. Though it is incorrect to state that all members of the Catholic Church in Argentina during the period of the Dirty War supported the junta, those who did nothing only hindered the Mothers’ efforts in gaining international support and seeking justice.

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<sup>84</sup> Susan Eckstein, *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1988), 248.

<sup>85</sup> Bouvard, 227.

The hierarchy of the Catholic Church was closely associated with the leaders of the military government during the period of the Dirty War. The Church often held special masses for the members of the junta and priests were even involved at the torture centers. Priests that were once the confidants of many Mothers began to turn them away. For example, Hebe de Bonafini, according to *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, went to seek help from her bishop, Monsignor Antonio Plaza, when her son disappeared only to find that he was asking her informative questions along with a retired policeman not for the purpose of support but to betray her. Another Mother, Evel Aztrabe de Petrini, had a similar incident where her priest, who worked at the same Sunday school as her son who had disappeared, refused to see her.

Recently, in 2007, an Argentinean priest, Reverend Rubén Capitanio, condemned the Catholic Church for its role in the military dictatorship. He stated during the trial of Father Christian von Wernich, a priest accused by many witnesses of being present at torture sessions at different detention centers that “the attitude of the church was scandalously close to the dictatorship to such an extent that I would say it was of a sinful degree”. Father von Wernich is also accused of what many priests have been accused of; extracting “confessions to help the military root out perceived enemies, while at the same time, offering comforting words and hope to family members searching for loved ones who had been kidnapped by the government”. Because of actions like this, Reverend Capitanio further stated that the church “was like a mother that did not look for her children” and that “It did not kill anybody, but it did not save anybody, either”<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> Alexei Barrionuevo, “Argentina Church Faces ‘Dirty War’ Past”, *New York Times*, Sept 17, 2007(<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/17/world/americas/17church.html>).

The Catholic Church turned its own back on its own followers when all they had was faith and were in their most desperate time of need. The Mothers therefore had to find other means of gaining support and aid. This led them to take further steps that would draw more attention to their cause and they did this by seeking international attention.

### The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Travel to Italy

Since the Catholic Church ignored the pleas of the Mothers for help and worked with the junta to suppress any opposition, the Mothers decided to make a bold trip to Italy to visit the Vatican and seek help from Pope Paul VI. Though their hopes for any help from him were denied because he refused to meet with them, their trip made international headlines. This placed pressure on the Argentine government because rumors of human rights violations began to gain the attention of international organizations such as the United Nations and Amnesty International. Representatives from these organizations and other countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Denmark, began to visit Argentina to investigate the claims of the Mothers and the rumors of human rights violations.

### Support from the Catholic Church outside of Argentina

Ironically, the Catholic Church and other religious institutions in other countries supported the Mothers. As stated previously in chapter three, a large amount of foreign aid came from the Netherlands following exposure of the atrocities occurring in Argentina brought by the World Cup in 1978. Much of this foreign aid came from the organization SAAM which consisted of leftists and Christian Democrats<sup>87</sup>. The Mothers were also greatly supported by the Catholic and Protestant churches in Germany which helped gain support from other Western

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<sup>87</sup> Bouvard, 256.

European nations, such as France, Spain, and Italy. In South America, the Uruguayan Mothers of the Disappeared gave support to the Mothers of Argentina and the Chilean women searching for their disappeared loved ones reached out to the Argentine mothers for support<sup>88</sup>.

### Overall Influence of the Catholic Church

During the Dirty War, the Catholic Church in Argentina became the greatest opposition and enemy to those fighting repression and calling for justice and democracy, including the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo next to the junta themselves. They stood by the side of the repressors very well knowing what they were supporting and created obstacles for the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in their efforts to seek answers, democracy and justice. Their influence forced the Mothers to look elsewhere for support and led them to take greater measures to have their voices heard. By seeking international awareness, the Mothers were able to gain support from international organizations and countries which placed pressure on the junta and resulted in the opening of human rights investigations.

In Chile, the Catholic Church played a very different role under the dictatorship of Pinochet. The Catholic Church did not support the dictatorship and lent all of its support to those affected by the dictatorship. They helped the women of the disappeared not only seek answers and justice, but also provided them with food, shelter, and employment. For this reason, the Chilean women did not take their protests to such an international extent as the Mothers of Argentina did because they had a strong institution on their side fighting with them for democracy and justice. In Chile, the Catholic Church led a crusade in ending human rights violations occurring under Pinochet while the Catholic Church in Argentina associated itself with

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<sup>88</sup> Bouvard, 255.

the junta because they supported the ideals they were trying to implant into society. Interestingly enough, under two very similar circumstances during the same time period, the Catholic Church played very oppositional roles which greatly affected both efforts made by the women of Chile and the Mothers of Argentina.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The previous chapters have discussed the historical forces that affected the women's movements in Chile and Argentina as well as the formation of their organizations, the obstacles they had to overcome, the support or lack of support they had internally and internationally and how feminism and motherhood contributed to their movements. All of these together led to the decline in power of the authoritative repressors and eventually to the end of the dictatorships.

### The End of the Pinochet Dictatorship

In 1988, a national plebiscite took place in Chile to determine if Pinochet would continue to be dictator for another eight years or if the country would transition to another form of government. This had been established in the 1980 Constitution that Pinochet put in place under his dictatorship. The plebiscite was to follow a voting of "yes-no" where there would be one proposed candidate that could either be approved or not approved by the voters. It was announced that Pinochet would be the proposed candidate and if he won the plebiscite, he would remain in power and the junta would continue to have legislative power. However, if the majority of the votes were "no" then a Presidential election would take place and a new President and Congress would take office in March of 1990.

On October 5, 1988, the plebiscite was held. The majority of the votes, specifically 54.7%, were "no" votes and Pinochet stepped down as dictator<sup>89</sup>. After a year of transition and refilling parliament, Patricio Aylwin of the Christian Democrat Party was elected President of Chile in December of 1989. Pinochet remained Commander in Chief of the Chilean Army until 1998. In the same year, while he was having surgery in London, Pinochet was arrested by orders of a Spanish judge. He was taken to Madrid to stand charges of kidnapping, torture and

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<sup>89</sup> Constable and Valenzuela, 316.

genocide. However, because of his ailing health, he was sent back to Chile where he died in 2006 without ever facing any consequences or punishment for the human rights violations that occurred under his dictatorship<sup>90</sup>.

### The End of the Dirty War

The junta's decline in power in Argentina is attributed to the Falkland War with the United Kingdom. The islands had long been disputed over by Argentina and the United Kingdom although Britain had occupied the islands since 1833. As stated in *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, the decision to invade the islands was "an act of desperation by the government" because of the enormous amount of foreign debt they had accumulated<sup>91</sup>. What came to be known as the "Falkland fiasco" began in 1982. The junta made two assumptions that caused their invasion to backfire. The first was that they assumed the British would not respond to the invasion of their territory as strongly as they did. The other was that the junta believed the United States would support them in the invasion. To their surprise, Britain sent a large naval force to fight over the islands and the United States not only supported the British but also cut off economic support they once provided to Argentina. It took only seventy-two days for Argentina to surrender. The humiliating loss diminished the power the junta had and tainted the perspective many Argentinean supporters had of them. Less than a year later, the junta no longer held authority when Raúl Alfonsín was elected as the new President of Argentina.

### Transition to Democracy

The transition to democracy in Chile and Argentina was pivotal for the women's movements in accomplishing their goals of obtaining justice. Victims of both dictatorships were

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<sup>90</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/11/world/americas/11pinochet.html?pagewanted=4&\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/11/world/americas/11pinochet.html?pagewanted=4&_r=1)

<sup>91</sup> Bouvard, 119.

able to come forward and give their testimonies. Their testimonies, along with the investigations that commenced after the dissolution of the dictatorships, brought perpetrators and individuals who were involved in the human rights violations to face justice and stand trials. The findings from the investigations, such as the ones conducted by the Commissions of Truth in Chile and CONADEP in Argentina, brought closure for many families of the disappeared because bodies were recovered and identified, the truth about the fate of the disappeared became known, and the obtainment of justice became a reality. However, the governments that proceeded Pinochet in Chile were more active in uncovering the truth, exposing the atrocities that had occurred, bringing the guilty to trial, and accepting what had happened in their country in order to avoid such events from taking place again than the proceeding governments of the Dirty War did in Argentina. This meant that the Chilean women did not have to pursue larger actions in order to gain justice since the government cooperated and worked with them in trying to obtain it.

With the approval of President Alfonsín in 1987, the Law of Due Obedience dismissed charges against all but the commanding officers who were accused of ordering torture and executions in Argentina<sup>92</sup>. Under the next president, Carlos Menem, Jorge Rafael Videla and Emilio Massera, two of the leaders of the junta, among other perpetrators who were indicted for their involvement in the Dirty War under the presidency of Alfonsín, were pardoned because, in the words of Menem, “Argentina lived through a dirty war, but the war is over”<sup>93</sup>. This meant that the end of the rule of the military junta did not signify the end of the Mothers’ efforts in pursuing democracy and justice. Even until this day, the country has not fully taken responsibility for what happened during 1976 and 1983 and many puzzle pieces remain missing surrounding the fate of many of the disappeared. Because of this, the Mothers, as well as the Grandmothers

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<sup>92</sup> Taylor, 13.

<sup>93</sup> Taylor, 14.

and Children of the Plaza de Mayo continue with their efforts in keeping the memory of the disappeared alive by publicly protesting to place pressure on the government to admit the injustices that incurred during the Dirty War. By doing so, they actively pursue justice and have their voices heard by people around the world, making their efforts aware to international audiences. In fact, their continued efforts have paid off because in 2006, President Néstor Kirchner declared the Law of Due Obedience unconstitutional which has opened many doors to persecuting the guilty involved in the Dirty War.

### Logistics and Comparisons

A reason why I believe that throughout my studies, I have come across the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo rather than the groups of women who formed organizations in Chile under their respective dictatorships is because of logistics. During a seven year period, as many as thirty thousand people were tortured and killed in Argentina. In contrast, over seventeen years, roughly three thousand Chileans were disappeared. Also, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo were the first group to publically protest and found power in numbers with their growing membership which peaked at over four thousand. In Chile, small organizations formed in response to the disappearances and therefore, did not join as one large group striving towards the same goal which would have given them a greater voice.

The role of the Catholic Church in Chile provided immense support to the women whose loved ones became disappeared. Therefore, they did not need to take bolder steps in gaining attention and spreading awareness like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo had to because they had no internal support in Argentina. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo also had the opportunity to gain attention on an international level with the hosting of the 1978 World Cup

and the Falklands War because they took advantage of the media covering both events. The Mothers have also continued with their efforts in protesting and achieving justice because the Argentine government has yet to release vital information to the public surrounding the Dirty War while Chileans have come to terms with the truth. The Mothers have also established an office headquarters, a bookstore, library, and work with local universities in Argentina which has kept their activism alive and known.

The combination of all these factors and influences not only affected the movements by the women at the time of their formation but have affected the level at which they are known today.

### Influence and Inspiration

Today, many questions are left unanswered to the whereabouts of many of the disappeared. The women in Chile, particularly the members of the AFDD, still meet and work together to pursue further justice and keep the memory of the disappeared alive so that the horrific events the unraveled in Chile will not be forgotten. However, their membership has declined and efforts are not as strong as they used to be, which can be attributed to the progress Chile has made in facing reality by coming to terms with the truth and raising awareness with efforts such as opening the Museum of Memory and Human Rights and creating memorial sites all over the country. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo continue to meet every Thursday in front of the Casa Rosada, wearing their white handkerchiefs and holding up photos of their disappeared children. Their efforts remain strong because they have yet to attain all of their goals and although membership has dwindled because of the passing of many Mothers, many other organizations have formed that share the same objective as they do.

Both groups of women have influenced and inspired women around the world to break out of the social boundaries placed on them in order to stand up for democracy and justice. Through their continual efforts, they were able to give themselves a voice and speak out against the repression that was trying to silence them. The women of Chile and Mothers of Argentina overcame several obstacles and are greatly admired today for their persistence that led to the exposure of the atrocities committed and have brought the guilty to justice. These two groups of women stand as examples of what individuals can achieve with determination, courage and hope.

## Appendix 1: Chilean Arpilleras



Depicting the military coup on September 11, 1973  
Moneda Palace.



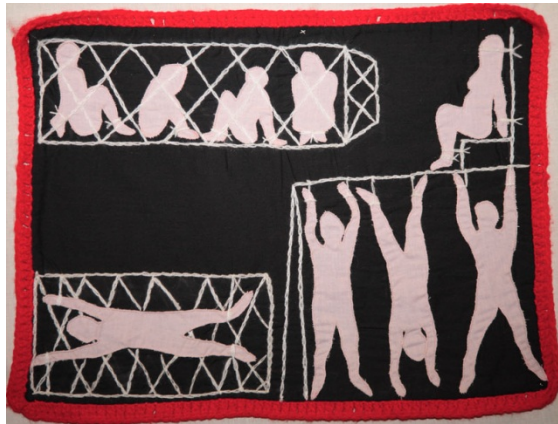
Women holding up photos of the  
disappeared with a banner reading "Where  
are they?"



Depicting women sewing arpilleras.



Women protesting and holding photos up of  
the disappeared. There is also a cemetery  
with "NN" on the graves, signifying "no  
nombre" or "no name". In the corner,  
military officers killing individuals.



An arpillera depicting torture.



A woman sewing an arpillera with photos of the disappeared and a dove with the word "justice" underneath.

Appendix 2: The Association of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared (AFDD)  
Disappeared (AFDD)



To the right, Gabriela Zuñiga.



A poster in the AFDD of photos of the disappeared. It reads “Memory, Justice Truth, No to Impunity!”

### Appendix 3: Memorial Sites in Chile



Entrance of the former detention center Villa Grimaldi, now a memorial site called Park for Peace. The walkway is lined with photos of the disappeared.



Large photos of the disappeared displayed at the park.

More photos of Villa Grimaldi/ Park for Peace



One of the many plaques in the ground that mark places of torture. This one says “Sit of torture: Hangings”.

#### Appendix 4: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo



The Plaza de Mayo in front of the Casa Rosada (the Pink House)



A mother sitting next to a wall full of photos of the disappeared in the Mothers' headquarters.



A Mother with a handkerchief (pañuelo) on her head that has the name of her disappeared child and the date they were disappeared, standing in front of the Casa Rosada.



Two mothers marching at the 2008 International Human Rights Day at the Plaza de Mayo.

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