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Nigel J. Young

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Early Christianity and Antimilitarism—Mass Violence and Trends

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Leiden: Brill, 2002. [Develops the thought of the Indian philosopher P. R. Sarkar, who grounds his macrohistory in Indian history. This work also offers a comparative analysis of Sinic, Indic, Islamic, and Western macrohistory.]

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SOHAIL INAYATULLAH

MADRES DE LA PLAZA DE MAYO. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo is a group of women whose children "disappeared" during the military dictatorships in Argentina between 1976 and 1983. The mothers are noteworthy for departing from their gendered domestic spheres to play a decidedly visible and public role in denouncing human rights abuses. In a highly charged and repressive political environment, they employed their traditional roles as mothers as a mechanism of protest; men would have had more difficulty with a similar undertaking. Observers commonly view the "Mothers" as a model social movement for peacefully challenging repressive state structures.

In 1973, Juan Perón returned to the Argentine presidency for the final time. The elderly Perón died, and his wife (and vice-president), Isabel Perón, took power. Under her leadership, the Peronist movement split, leading to a military government. The dictatorship launched a "Dirty War" against its opponents, particularly the Montoneros guerrilla movement, leaving thirty thousand people dead and "disappeared."

Establishment

On 20 April 1977, a group of women, frustrated by the endless search for their children, gathered at the Plaza de Mayo in central Buenos Aires. Strategically positioned in front of the Casa Rosada, Argentina's presidential palace, the women publically denounced the military government for their role in the disappearances

of their sons and daughters. The military took their children alive, and they demanded that the government return them alive. The mothers also called for a public accounting of the reign of terror and punishment for those responsible for the crimes.

The original group of fourteen women, between the ages of forty and sixty-two, met every Thursday afternoon and walked for a half an hour around the plaza. The mothers wore their trademark white scarves embroidered with the names of their missing children. Derisively called *las locas* (the crazy women), they used their weekly meetings to publicize their cause, support each other emotionally, and strategize for future actions.

Scholars commonly cast the mothers as a classic example of a new social movement because they organized outside the structures of political parties and seemingly used their position as mothers for the limited and defined goal of freeing their children. As their struggle matured, however, the mothers began to engage broader political concerns as they took more radical positions. Their actions challenged existing paradigms and created new ways of operating politically.

Though scholars sometimes consider the use of motherhood as an organizing force as an innovation, Latin American history has numerous examples of women inverting gender roles for political purposes. The mothers group developed out of the growing participation of women in the democratic and human-rights movements of the mid-1970s. The experience of the mothers also challenged the myth that motherhood is safe from political repression. When the women stepped outside their traditional and preassigned gender roles, they faced the same viciousness of the repressive state apparatus as did male dissidents. Away from the public eye, military officials often used the most brutal tools of rape and torture on dissident women. In December 1977, government forces "disappeared" the leading mother Azucena Villaflor along with eleven other activists. The regime detained the group at the Navy Mechanical School that it used as a torture center before killing them by dropping their bodies from an aircraft.

Hebe de Bonafini (b. 1928) served as president of the Association of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo from 1979 and became the public face of the protests. Bonafini was a married mother of three children when, in 1977, her oldest son Jorge disappeared, soon followed by another son.

Schism

In 1986, the mothers split into two factions. One group, called the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo–Founding Line, focused on legislation, the recovery of the remains of their children, and bringing ex-officials to justice. Bonafini continued to lead a more radical faction under the name Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Association. These mothers felt responsible for carrying on their children's political work; they assumed the agenda that originally led to the disappearance of the dissidents they wanted returned. This led to strong anti-imperialist statements and support for radical groups, including the Basque ETA separatists in Spain and the FARC guerrillas in Colombia. Unlike the Founding Line, the Association refused government help or compensation. They pledged not to recognize the deaths of their children until the government would admit to its fault. Bonafini's group fought for a complete socialist transformation of Argentine society.

A third group, called the Civil Association of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, was formed in 1977 to find the kidnapped children of the missing dissidents. The military government often took the dissidents' children and placed them with families that supported the dictatorship, sometimes giving children to the very people who participated in the torture and deaths of their parents. Under the guidance of the association's president, Estela Barnes de Carlotto, the grandmothers found eighty-eight of an estimated five hundred children kidnapped or born in detention. Of those identified, some were returned to their biological families and some were raised jointly by their adoptive and biological families; other cases were stalled in court custody battles.

Accomplishments

In a historic case in April 2008, María Eugenia Sampallo successfully pursued a criminal case that led to the conviction of her adoptive parents. In December 1977, the military government arrested Mirta Mabel Barragán and Leonardo Ruben Sampallo. Barragán was six months pregnant and gave birth in prison before she and the baby's father were killed. The grandmothers spent twenty-four years looking for Sampallo; finally in 2001, DNA evidence proved the identity of her birth parents. Sampallo then pressed for the prosecution of her adoptive parents, Osvaldo Rivas and Maria Cristina Gomez, as well as army captain Enrique Berthier, who furnished the couple with the baby. The three were sentenced to

prison terms ranging from seven to ten years. Although some thought the sentence too light, gaining a kidnapping conviction against those engaged in an illegal adoption proved to be a landmark decision.

In 2005, the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team identified the remains of founder Azucena Villaflor. The mothers buried her ashes by the pyramid in the Plaza de Mayo where she had begun to organize against the military repression. On 26 January 2006, the Mothers Association held its final signature march. Allied with the sympathetic leftist government of Néstor Kirchner, the association argued that marches were no longer needed to press their political concerns. The Founding Line faction, however, planned to continue its marches.

The Mothers have received various awards for their efforts on behalf of the missing. These include the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 1992, the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education in 1999, and the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights in 2003.

[See also Gender and Violence; Latin America, Peace Movements in; Latin America, Social Justice Movements of; Women's Peace Movements, History of; and Women's Peace Organizations.]

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MARC BECKER

MALAYSIA AND CONFLICT AVOIDANCE. The riots that took place on 13 May 1969 are memorialized as the culmination of ethnic violence, concern over which remains an underlying fear in the country.