Between M-Otherness and Identity:
The Narratives of
“Four Mothers” and “Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo”

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Abstract

This paper comparatively analyzes the impact of political motherhood as expressed by two movements in different parts of the world – Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina and Four Mothers in Israel – seeking the safety of their loved ones. Challenging the state apparatus, the women transformed patriarchal maternal rhetoric into contentious wording as they forayed into the political arena. The paper also looks at the ways they interlaced their collective action with a wider "cycle of social protest," expanded public support and provided legitimacy to challengers’ discourse, allowing social protest to be expressed in ethical terms.

תקציר

ypsy he makhes zt ligmat hitnuiti mishavu bi’zait ha’tnueti ha’brerit – sakhmat milki no tamorstonet ha’avre’i apate’h. mishavu – zot baskelot mishavot b’urir hapatratot Passi la’arata politsit. kamaf yot ha’avre’i at batrono at she’arit ha’avre’i at rinat poale’i – "ai-mot," sibela bimoketat lefse ha’ivrit – hoklat at ne’or yisroel batrono. bhotat simla at hakholat apalit ha’ivrit ha’amitot al to’o mahor sakhma ha’brerit rubi zit farto slate’amidat Torah hashone at bino ha’hesed keve’zecor voh, bizorot frurak zekor bi’ne’erat sakhmat.

הלخيص

هدف هذه الورقة هو تحليل مقارن لآثار الأمومة السياسية كما عبرت عنها حركتان في ممكنها مختلفين من العالم - أبوالاس دي بلازا دي مايو في الأرجنتين وأربع أمهات في إسرائيل- اللتان هدفتا إلى حماية الأبناء. بتحدي جهاز الدولة استخدمت النساء خطاب الأمومة البطريركي كصيغة تعبير في عملية اقتحام الحلبة السياسية. كذلك تبحث الورقة في أساليب دمج نشاطهن الجماعي في حلقه أوسط من الاحتجاج الاجتماعي وهذا اكتسب الدعم الشعبي ووفرن شرعية لخطاب التحدي وأمكن التعبير عن الاحتجاج الشعبي بمفهوم أخلاقياً.
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Prologue

Argentina, 24 March, 1976; Israel, 5 June, 1982 Two democratic countries standing on the threshold of dramatic episodes; two dates on the national calendar whose events will mark a dark chapter in their history. Two nations overwhelmed by their own military apparatus: the one, facing a gory coup d'état that will nullify all civic liberties for the next eight years, spreading death, fear and grief among its citizens by means of state-terror practices; the other, plunged into a worthless war, sending its sons to fight – and die – on the same Lebanese battlefield that their fathers fought – and died – for as long as 18 years.

Although democracy in Argentina was never strong enough to stand for long periods against the military or the local oligarchies, since the return from exile of their controversial leader, Juan Perón, the democratic institutions in Argentina crumbled even further. His death, soon after becoming Argentina's president for the third time, officially left his widow "Isabelita" in charge, though her weakness and lack of public support opened the rift to the bloodiest totalitarian regime that
ever ruled that country. Known as the "dirty war," between 1976 and 1983, the Argentinean military junta tortured without restraint, incarcerated without trial, vanished thousands of political opponents while keeping an uncertain number of children – kidnapped with their fathers or born in captivity – as "war booty," divested of their real identity. Some still live in this macabre fake bubble despite the democratic process started after the Falklands war.

On the other side of the world, the relocation of Palestinians, led by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), in South Lebanon's refugee camps after being expelled from Jordan was seen in Israel as a growing menace. Nevertheless, a de facto ceasefire between the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the PLO kept the international border quiet for almost a year. Then, on 3 June, 1982, Abu Nidal's ruthless terrorist group attempted to assassinate Israel's ambassador in London, Shlomo Argov. In response, the right-wing government of Menachem Begin, spurred on by defense minister, Ariel Sharon, invaded Lebanon to oust the PLO and its cohorts. The Lebanese rice and flowers that first welcomed the IDF rapidly changed into bombs and bullets; Sharon's first declared 40 kms. turned into a siege on Beirut and led to a long-lasting occupation of a strip of South Lebanon. What was meant to be a short military campaign became a bloody cul-de-sac for 18 years, no matter which party won the elections in Israel.

Those two mighty, militarized countries refused to see the strength of the mothers' despair – and chose to continue to perceive this sector as acquiescent, powerless "Others." With the determination of those women to get their children back home, a powerful new home front took shape.

Argentina, 22 October, 1977; Israel, 4 February, 1997 Two tiny, seemingly voiceless civilian groups take their private grievances to the public stage, fulfilling their supreme commitment: to preserve Life. Two dates in the story of maternal contentious struggle whose impact had already changed the course of history.

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1 Called "dirty" because it was a terrorist, civil conflict rather than a conventional war abiding by the international rules of war.

2 Although Abu Nidal was vehemently opposed to the PLO and its leader, Yasser Arafat, the assassination attempt was the trigger for Israel's decision to push the PLO out of Lebanon.
Introduction

"The bond between Mother and Child is subordinated to another order which has political primacy, but which is both emotionally and morally questionable." (Hirsch 1989: 37)

"Women give birth": three words that confirm the biological distinctiveness of womankind; an ontological awareness regarding the inherent link between females and Life, the certainty of being part of the "cycle of Life in Nature." This assertion might be understood as simply as it sounds, unless an additional couple of words, such as "and then..." are added. This additional element embodies an extraordinary story –"the "M-Otherhood" tale." In this case, "Motherhood," rather than telling us about the natural capability of women to give birth, represents a cultural invention, branching out over human space and time.

"Women give birth": this biological fact has long been used as the rationale behind the demarcation of women's social habitat, setting segregative constraints in order to keep them within the private realm while supporting male's primacy in the public sphere. Thus, male's political hegemony is reinforced by the continuous weaving of social patterns based on a gendered division of work.

Motherhood, as instituted alongside the occidental metanarrative, carries an extra burden of demands, overlapping with its "preservative love"\(^3\) primordial demand. Hence, this prior demand – to preserve an offspring's life at all costs – is complemented by a second one: to nurture the child's emotional and intellectual development. The third demand, however, does not flow from the same source: it stems from the resulting interaction between the "society-mother-child" triad and emphasizes the maternal duty to shape children's behavior, as stipulated by the hegemonic social order. (Ruddick 1995: 19, 21). This last demand opens the game to a third actor, turning the whole relationship into dialectic terms, usually filled with tensions and conflicting interests between the mother's primordial duty to her child and societal requirements, pushing incessantly toward outputs that will guarantee the endurance of the social structure.

\(^3\) Originated through the dyad "mother-child," preserving a child's life is the constitutive core, the permanent aim of maternal practice; "Preservative love is an activity of caring or treasuring creatures whose well-being is at risk." (Ruddick 1982: 240).
Although neither the entry of the liberal welfare state into areas commonly recognized as private nor the resulting structural changes experienced by the traditional dichotomy between "public" and "private" rescued women from the regulations assimilated during their own socialization training, this new scenario revealed an inner contradiction which made possible new identities:

As public policies win a more direct and visible impact upon citizens, citizens in turn try to win a more immediate and more comprehensive control over political elites by means that are seen frequently to be incompatible with the maintenance of the institutional order of the polity.

(Offe 1985: 817).

Women joined the new trend, whose lemma was no longer based in terms of "welfare and security," so fervently upheld throughout the industrial era, but on multiple voices dealing with a wide range of claims to "quality of life," characteristic of post-industrial societies.

In this new setting, women found their way toward the public field through creative, non-hierarchic and non-institutionalized contentious collective actions, Grassroots movements. The themes that caught their attention centered mostly on (a) economic issues (securing their family's physical survival, usually through local or regional forms of cooperation); (b) ethnic contests (as revolutionaries, fighting for freedom and equal rights or, in the conservative wing, trying to maintain the status quo, indispensable to preserving what they perceived as their relatives' righteous position); (c) an expanded understanding of their social role as mothers, transferred to pacifist activism, the defense of human rights and the environment, or to more traditional areas such as health, education and welfare, and (d) the feminist struggle. (West & Blumberg 1990: 13).

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4 I embrace Offe's definition of contentious collective action as "some explicit claim that the means of action can be recognized as legitimate and the ends of action can become binding for the wider community." (Offe 1985: 826-827).
This paper aims to analyze the stories of two social movements, both consolidated around the emblematic figure of "patriarchal motherhood," one dealing with peace and national security affairs and the other with human and civil rights: "Four Mothers" in Israel and "Abuelas [Grandmothers] de Plaza de Mayo" in Argentina. By shifting their private grievances into a self-empowering political device, the traditionally maternal self-sacrifice representation – constituent of both movements' narrative – becomes a metonymy to their restless capacity to act on behalf of their family's wholeness and welfare. Following the logic of what Klaus Eder calls "the ritual reversal of official reality," these women succeeded to transform their structural constraints into an ethical lever:

Protest action is nothing but the reversal of institutional action – not to be centralized, but decentralized; not to be legal, but legitimate; not formal, but informal; not to act strategically, but expressively. The protest action is a continuation of an old logic of collective protest, that of moral indignation. (Eder 1985: 879).

A review of the collected data – based on several interviews and other published documents – shows that a single incident served as a trigger to the creation of both movements. Through their leaders' eyes, those incidents were witnessed as core threats, jeopardizing the very existence of their progeny and of their selves as "motherbeings." Their testimonies reveal a conscious convergence between the participants' perception of a threat as existential and their sudden urgency to organize themselves as collective political actors.

This research, based on narrative analysis, is placed within the political theory field. Its intention is to clarify the intertwined streams underlying the chosen narrative and to offer insight into the reasons they became strong enough to get the mothers to shift from their traditionally acquiescent role in the private sphere to that of activists in the public arena. It will discuss the projection of the

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5 I understand "social movements" as defined by Tarrow: "Collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities." (Tarrow 1994:11).
aporetic relation disclosed after the inevitable encounter between the "patriarchal motherhood story" and the "political motherhood narrative," focusing on its impact on the design of an alternative contentious language within a larger cycle of social protest, while highlighting the mothers' ethical contribution in terms of legitimate civil insurgency in defense of core social values.

Since qualitative research does not offer a general model to explain the whole phenomenon (maternal contentious politics within the social movements' field), the methodology here requires a holistic approach that includes an extensive background analysis of (a) the "big stories" (metanarratives) behind the nation-state fundamental nature, while stressing the local nuances experienced in both countries; (b) the individual and collective socialization processes of the actors involved; and (c) their allocation within the political opportunity structure POS, in order to achieve a more comprehensive acquaintance with the interwoven narratives that underlie the stories and what they accomplished – which in turn, were able to make possible the wording of the maternal contentious plot, as revealed in both discursive repertoires and praxis.

It is my goal here to provide readers with interpretative tools that may decant the multiple constituents bending the narrative path walked by the Mothers; I will also lay the foundations of a sort of "observation post" from where one can witness – both, analytically and emotionally – the unique strength of those women's collective action and their contribution to broadening the perimeter of (legitimate) civil contentious practices as true heirs of the tragic saga of Antigone and other mythological heroines.

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6 "Aporia: A rhetorical figure of doubt in which the conditions of possibility of an event or concept are, paradoxically, its own conditions of impossibility resulting in an interpretative impasse or moment of undecideability. Given such a contradiction, an impossible resolution can be reached by working the aporia through the textual apparatus of a narrative." (McQuillan 2000: 315).

7 The term 'political motherhood' first appeared in Jennifer Schirmer's 1993 paper about two social groups acting under the prerogatives of maternity in Central America. (mentioned in Werbner 1999: 221).

8 The phrase 'cycle of protest' refers to a stage of high conflict and contention across society that includes: a rapid diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilized sectors; a quickened pace of innovation in the forms of contention; new or transformed collective action frames; a combination of organized and unorganized participation; and sequences of intensified interaction between challengers and authorities which can end in reform, repression or sometimes revolution." (Tarrow 1995: 153).

9 Peter Eisinger was the first to point out the crucial importance of the POS on the further development or extinction of social movements. In his pioneer research he outlined five dimensions: (a) the grade of difficulty in achieving decision-makers' level ("open" or "closed" regimes); (b) the stability score performed by the political system; (c) the success in recruiting important potential allies; (d) the vulnerability of elites; and (e) the extension of coercive means used by the government. (Eisinger 1973: 11-28).
Two Faces, One Soul: The Reification of Motherhood/The Depreciation of Maternal Work

Perhaps women are better able than men to reconcile the individual and the group because women have traditionally subordinated their needs to those of others. 
Rohrlich & Hoffman Baruch. (1984: xii)

The cultural constructions of "M-Otherness," as found in modern Western societies, cannot be taken as isolated social phenomena. They are an integral element intertwined within a larger and well-built structure, an elaborate artifact fused from a bunch of ideologies devoted to the perpetuation of a hierarchical social order constructed on gender, class and/or race discrimination patterns. Through these ideological lenses, the re-coded maternal task relies upon a dichotomous system deliberately set to serve male's hegemony – patriarchy – it shields a labor order based on exploitation – capitalism – and perpetuates the superiority of science upon nature – technology. (Nakano Glenn 1994: 12).
Likewise, women traditionally have been excluded from whole citizenship practice due to the inveterate nexus between citizens’ bestowed rights and the (male) practice of bearing arms: "Masculinity and militarism might be pictured as two knitting needles; wielded together, they can knit a sturdy institutional sock." (Enloe 2000: 235).

To assure the survival of the hegemonic social order, a psychological mechanism is implemented to compel a strong feeling of love throughout somebody (or something), despite the fact that the object of worship arouses feelings of hate and love simultaneously. This contrivance is called "idealization." As the component of hate is hidden from consciousness, love is pulled from reality and becomes an alienated emotion, due to its partner's lack of presence. If, by chance, this perception of "reality" is disrupted, an outburst of anger is expected to dash and deny the possibility of contact with the hidden side of the equation (Dally 1982: 93-5). A hard but illustrative example of this behavior pattern can be found in the testimonies of several women kept in captivity at the Olimpo, one of
365 secret concentration camps commanded by the Argentinean army during the years of the *junta* regime. The negative image of the "public," "active" woman triggered and facilitated a systematic assault on the reproductive organs of detained women: stories of rape and vexation under the compassionate eyes of María show the harsh dichotomy between the idealized image of "The Mother" (of Jesus) and the "flesh and blood" woman/mother, victimized. (Taylor 1997: 186).

Understanding "M-Otherness" as an invention intended to attain the meta-goal of strengthening male’s hegemony within the public realm explains why fulfilling the maternal role is, therefore, not identified as a "political" act. Forged within the nation-state metanarrative framework, motherhood is reified while the practices of mothering are devalued. In a gendered division of labor, maternal work has been relegated traditionally to the sphere of "nature." Thus, it is possible to delineate the boundaries of this cultural device by recalling the three "Ks": *Kinder, Küche und Kirche*¹⁰ (Feijoó & Gogna 1990: 79; Feijoó 1989: 75). It is between those two seemingly antagonistic perceptions, that women – and mothers – carve an expanded definition of "the political."

The Judeo-Christian patriarchal ideology adopted this dual strategy to keep women out of the public scenario while still making them feel intrinsically linked to the collective; they were labeled "the reproducers of the nation," "the depositories of all the virtues of society," responsible for carrying the extra burden of social core values required to coach new generations of citizens (Phoenix & Woollett 1991: 17). In Argentina, as in Israel – thanks to an overgrown set of deep-rooted fears, resulting from dominant "security threat" discursive trends – the exclusion of women from public affairs is even more tangible. As I will broadly describe below through a comparative analysis of the narrative emplotment of *Four Mothers* and *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, the conjunction of exacerbated military orientations and a public and deliberated worship of *The Family as The National Institution* set the sociopolitical space for new constituencies to appear in a particularly dramatic fashion.

¹⁰ From the German: “Children, Kitchen, Church.” The “three Ks” apply to social functions traditionally attributed to women, namely reproduction, domestic tasks, socialization of children within the family, sexuality, etc.
M-Otherhood's Loom: Military Threads, Military Threats

The most conspicuous attribute of modern countries lies in their being "nation-states"; this political configuration is based on the binary distinction between "citizen" and "foreigner." Under the continuous threat of war – resulting from the anarchic condition of the international system – the modern nation-state has been confined within a vicious circle of mutual insecurity known as the "security dilemma." Thus, as Kimmerling notes: "The entire social nexus, in both institutional (economic, industrial, legislative) and cognitive terms, is oriented toward permanent war preparation (of course) in order to defend the collectivity’s very existence." (Kimmerling 2001: 214). Due to this particular context, the hegemonic discourse has been constructed among the mythical/gendered features of "Just Warriors" and "Beautiful Souls". (Elshtain 1987: 141; Hegel 1977: 399-400).

The skill to wage war is reliant on a successful process of extraction, whether the target is men, foodstuffs, taxes or weapons; no other scenario before has shown the efficiency levels achieved by the nation-state and its symbiotic institution – the military – in this matter. The centralization of political power, the expansion of administrative rule, the emergence of mass armies and the deployment of force share a common need for supplies, accomplished by the elites' manipulations of the people, encouraging them to be willing to make sacrifices (and even die) for the sake of the motherland. Several nuances of "amor patriae," blended with the Christian concept of "caritas," were employed as the foundations of the highest level of civic commitment.\textsuperscript{11}

As noted, countries with a strong bias toward the "national security" approach – like Argentina during the junta's dictatorship years or Israel – present a distinctively and more accurate dichotomous social scenario for their political practices: as the fostering of nationalistic trends become a national target in itself, the social mechanisms implemented to maintain the structural inferiority of

\textsuperscript{11} It is no coincidence that in earlier types of nation-states, such as Athens or Sparta, the only ones to receive the highest public recognition in burial ceremonies (that is, have their names engraved on their tombstones) were soldiers who fell in action and mothers who died while delivering their babies (Held 1996: 76-8; Elshtain 1987: 129, 131).
women get stronger, affixing their social task to collective goals. (Herzog 1998: 330-1). In terms of the political community, women/mothers are usually considered in relation to their offspring – the most precious key for societal endurance, the raison d'être for men engaging in war, and themselves seen as social "commodities." Bearing children, subsequently, makes it feasible for women to get a "social inclusion license," although society loads on mothers' shoulders a huge burden of norms and constraints to assure their consent (acquiescent or compelled) to perform their representative task (Werbner & Yuval-Davis 1999: 12-13). Paradoxically, this social entrenching of women as "mothers" endowed them with an unusual deference and, therefore, the legitimacy of their "sorties" into the public realm is derived from manipulating their public recognition as "good" mothers combined with a skillful handling of the constituent representations of "motherhood" – commonly used by the secular and religious hierarchy to endorse patriarchal metanarrative constructions, as the ritual framework providing the needed metaphors to withhold their monopoly on political power.

Hence, creating an expanded definition of "the political" through the process of participation, Four Mothers and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo showed their ability to slip into the core of their self-empowering political identity’s construction plot, which was meant to remain "forever" the basic cue of the whole patriarchal nation-state apparatus. In Ruddick's words, these women realized that "a politics of protest originated and controlled by ‘mothers’ jars accepted sensibilities […] and transforms maternal status from emblem to agent." (Ruddick 1997: 374).

In Israel – especially after the Oslo Accords of the early 1990s – the militarization of mothers is still fundamental for sustaining the country’s war-waging culture: likewise other countries whose multiple social representations forged from national security policies characterize the cultural and political public discourse, the decision-makers yearn to control not only the life of men but of women as well, so as to feed the military machinery. Taking for granted the mothers' role as they perceived it, Israeli decision-makers often allowed (Jewish)
mothers to intrude on the "military armor": "Making up a picnic basket can be militarized if it is packed with the intention of keeping up the morale of the soldiers." (Enloe 2000: 257). Hence, the collective imagery is overloaded with myths about the "heroism" of "national recruited" mothers, assuring by these means an enduring conformist pattern of behavior, dressed as "national privilege." The journalist Eran Shachar recalls some common phrases that illustrate this social feature, so deeply rooted in Israeli jargon: a "woman's womb is the first conscription base" or "[Jewish] maternal feelings work on 'full gas' till the day their children pass through the gates of the recruiting army base." (Hakibbutz, 08.04.98: 10). Nevertheless, women strategizing as mothers and the politics of motherhood were increasingly significant processes in the 1990s; the onset of this collective action exposed an imminent shift in Israeli Jewish women’s consciousness. For this reason, Four Mothers' distinctive discourse offers an exceptional possibility to examine the explicit and latent consequences of the maternal contentious strategy during the war in Lebanon.

The movement began as the emotional response of a small group of female friends from the Upper Galilee, mothers of young male soldiers, all serving in special units in South Lebanon. What the mothers had in common was a weird sense of alienation drawn from sustained (though no longer seen as justified) social demands, a result of what they saw as the political stagnation of the policy-makers. They decided to engage in civil disobedience acts using a language that was seen not only as natural but also as viable and practical: the mothers decided it was time for women to correct what they realized was a dangerous deviation from the country's self-defense traditional policy, facing the male "logic" that jeopardized all possibilities to keep their sons out of the risk-range of what they now believed was a futile, needless war. The trigger that brought Four Mothers to challenge the acquiescent consensus between the military and the political elites was the accidental collision – seen as terrible and vain as that endless war – of two transport helicopters carrying Israeli troops into the so-called "security zone," killing all 73 soldiers aboard, in February 1997. The tragedy finally opened the rift: "We
are sick of living from one news broadcast to the next, and we are saying that it is better that parents speak up now than cry later." (Yedioth Ahronoth, 06.03.97).

Aware of the threat of mourning, Four Mothers engaged in reviewing the core cultural codes of the "good Jewish mother" and generated a new set of meanings able to flow through the Zionist metanarrative veins – translating stereotypes and symbols the Israelis had come to know in other contexts, transforming the former to fit into a completely different semantic field, in order to penetrate the male's armor – the "always righteous" IDF mythical façade.

As the chairwoman of the group, Rachel Ben-Dor, said:

I took action when I realized that there is no other way, that we must instruct our children how to live for our country and not only how to die for its sake. I feel I must do something to encourage this idea, for the safety of mine and the others' children. (Hakibbutz, 03.04.97: 12).

This statement may disclose a certain veiled criticism toward the education system – about the way it promotes nationalistic contents such as self-sacrifice or heroic selflessness: there are no signs of challenging the concept of nationalistic education, as expected from "recruited" mainstream mothers. This approach responded to a rational choice made by Four Mothers, not to clash with the consensus boundaries but to expand them, to find a space where they could state their claims without risking exclusion from the conventional path. However, the Mothers' call for a complete policy revision while encouraging a total withdrawal from Lebanon sometimes eroded the sons' motivation. This was the case of Bruria Sharon's son, Ofer, who decided not to obey a direct order to attack Hezbollah's ambushed men in February 1999. In this incident, three of Ofer's comrades died while he remained still. A year earlier, Bruria had written an open letter to the political and military authorities, which received considerable exposure in local newspapers (Four Mothers archives, 11.19.97):
As a citizen of this country I beg you to give me the chance to speak to you before becoming a bereaved mother. It may avoid the need [for you] to come to my home in order "to strengthen and leave reinforced". […] Our people knows how to praise, love and cry over our victims, to embrace and glorify them. I agree, it was necessary in the beginning, it was indispensable to keep fighting for our existence. It was also necessary in order to keep our strength when we were called to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of the country. But since then, we have "fallen in love" with sacrifice […] Let us call on the leaders to do whatever they must do to stop the immolation of more victims, to end the parade of the maimed and wounded.

Even though Bruria did not mean to explode the epic saga of Israel's warfare or deny the glory of sacrifice in the early stages of the country, her state of mind influenced her son's attitude to war. During Ofer's subsequent trial – and after the press disclosed the fact that he was Bruria's son – an unprecedented violent public debate developed against the "dissident" mothers. Bruria herself was accused by the father of one of the soldiers killed in that incident of "draining her son's batteries every time he returns home." (Ma'ariv, 01.27.2000).

While in the Israeli case the mothers kept intact their loyalty to the army as an institution – arguing that it was the government's misjudged policy in Lebanon that was jeopardizing the IDF's legitimacy – in Argentina the contention field was set as a zero-sum game from the beginning. The loutish intrusion of the military into the private realm was implemented systematically through a few recurrent mottos, such as: "Señora, do you know where are your children now?" seen over and over on TV screens. This hidden message – not less pervasive than others instrumented by the authorities to brainwash the local population – made the mothers the legitimate target of guilt: within the perfidious government discourse, mothers were compelled to put the alleged "holy national interest" before (if not instead of) their primordial commitment to their own progeny. The night raids in homes, the torture and the rape in the presence of frightened relatives, the power
of "vanishing" people or the issuing of new identities to captive children demonstrate that the patriarchal family institution, with its own hierarchic organizational structure, represented a threat to the junta’s aspiration: to become "the ruler of Life and Death." In the "dirty war," they beleaguered "blood and flesh" mothers and destroyed family unit ties as a way of breaking down the entire social fabric and disarticulating any attempt to resist tyranny.

Between 1976 and 1983, the armed forces in Argentina constructed a mighty self-image, strong and feared. In those years, the military apparatus did not hesitate to exploit the so-called "subversives' children" as a profitable resource to implement their national crusade: they kidnapped children and appropriated babies born in captivity and then turned them over for adoption to "loyal" families. This was a routine procedure implemented through a vast network across and beyond the country.

This modus operandus was set in order to "save" the new generations, keeping them away from "bad influences," as Ramón J. Camps, the former Buenos Aires Police chief, explained:

Personally I never killed a child; what I did was to hand over some of them to charitable organizations so that they could be given new parents. Subversive parents educate their children for subversion. This had to be stopped. (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo 1997: 113; Taylor 1997: 195).

In the name of the "Doctrine of National Security"12 two million citizens left Argentina to forced exile, 30,000 men and women were kidnapped, incarcerated or simply disappeared. Among them, 80 percent were between 16 and 35 years old; 30 percent of them women, and of those 10 percent were pregnant. (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo 1997: 111).

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12 "The Doctrine of National Security" is the result of the Cold War and the US efforts to avoid "another" Cuba in its backyard. Based on 1947's "Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance," the US Defense Dept. launched a training program in 1951 for Latin American armies. The main idea was to indoctrinate officers to believe that the fiercest enemy is the one emerging from "inside" (as organized clandestine cells). The question of "who may be a subversive?" had a simple answer: "Everyone that rejects the ideals of Christianity and the military, because those two are the ones to save the World from Comunism" (Arditti 1999: 11).
The Abuelas, those fragile older women, grandmothers all – most of them taking their first steps towards political confrontation – reconstructed from the wreckage a public space of memory and identity, while carrying on their tired shoulders a double load of absence and sorrow. They were isolated, with little support, as Alba Lanzillotto recalls: "Many people tried to convince us to abandon our search: 'Leave the children in peace,' they said, 'they have everything: good schools, a good standard of life, a family.'" But the Abuelas knew that these "luxuries" did not mean anything if the children's true identity remained obscure: "They are slaves". (http://www.ciudad.com.ar). Whereas the junta heralded its omnipotence, erasing biological ties and destinies, creating new identity for the stolen children, rewriting the nation’s whole genealogy, they became a beacon of sanity.

**Hitching Feminine Icons to Israel's Discursive Cart**

The fact that Israel is classified as "Western" – although its geographic location is out of the "traditional" Western range – as well as its being a country without recognized international frontiers even after more than half a century, offers scholars an extraordinary challenge. Moreover, a remarkable example of the idealization of feminine representations resulting from diverse "inclusion/exclusion" practices can be found on Israeli's cultural constructions.

Four Mothers' appropriation of (Jewish/Zionist) core feminine representations – in order to build up their own legitimate narrative foundations – stems from multiple sources:

- Strict ideological discourse (the Zionist ethos on the Jewish people's national revival);
- Jewish tradition (as the common denominator and the constituent of the nation's identity);
- The perception of national security affairs as an existential menace to the very existence of the country (utterances such as "a country under siege" or
“all the world is against us” design the nation’s symbolic ground, while exacerbating military trends on the population);

- Collective memories reflecting the harsh times of national dispersion and, especially, the Holocaust (ambiguously elaborated: although the Zionist narrative deplores the Diaspora, Israel’s commitment to the destiny of world Jewry places it in the role of patron as well as rescuer);

- Governmental intrusion on demographic issues – huge private and public funds toward new technologies on infertility research, the promotion of large families as a national priority; and

- Implementation of welfare policies deliberately directed to encourage higher birthrates (a vast network of public and semi-public day-care facilities and free public medical clinics for newborns and their mothers, along with a monthly child allowance from the National Insurance Institute, and the kibbutz educational system).

The combination of a nationalistic-leftist ideology along with the conditions reigning at the time of the establishment of Israel (demographic inferiority vis-à-vis its neighbors/enemies' large populations, a desperate lack of resources and a still slight differentiation of state powers), created the illusion of a complete inclusion of women – or at least, succeeded to postpone indefinitely any sectorial complaints (in this particular case, based on gender), while all efforts were directed toward the new national enterprise. (Enloe 2000: 36, 247, 254-7; Herzog 1998: 330-2).

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13 David Ben-Gurion was responsible for reshaping (Jewish women’s) fertility as a strategic national target, turning it into a political matter: “Any Jewish woman giving birth to less than four children disappoints her mission as a Jewish mother.” Ben-Gurion truly believed that without a dramatic increase in the birthrate, within a few generations the demographic curve would defeat the Jewish country. An illustrative example of his policy was the “National Fund for Brave Mothers,” designed to reward mothers who gave birth to 10 or more children. Later, other mechanisms were developed by the government, such as “the National Council of Birth Promotion” in the 1980s. Parallel to its foundation, a vocal public debate about abortion took place; the Council recruited the religious rhetoric against voluntary miscarriage, manipulating collective Holocaust memoirs (arguing that it was the duty of every Jewish woman to fulfill the demographic gap left after the genocide of World War II). This trend almost got its own visual expression: an advisor to the health minister proposed that any Jewish woman wishing to stop her pregnancy should see a film about the atrocities the Nazis committed on Jewish children before presenting her application to the medical board. Although this proposal finally fell, its rejection was far from unanimous. (Sharoni 1997: 149-50).

14 Alberto Melucci defines ideology as “a set of symbolic frames which collective actors use to represent their own actions to themselves and to the others, within a system of social relationships.” (Melucci 1992: 56).
The identification of women with the heroic combatant figure was fostered even before Israel attained independence: as Maoz Azarya recalls in his book, *State Rites*, the Hebrew woman was perceived as "intrinsically bound to the epic [Zionist] project." Examples such as the erection of a statue (1936) of Sara Chizick, one of Tel Hai's legendary fighters, beside unidentified male combatants, as a monument at Kibbutz Hulda or the addition of female figures on the Rappoport's memorial, at Kibbutz Negba, of fighters in the 1948 war represent the main artistic trend recruited to assure the proper engagement of the whole society to Zionist struggle and deeds. (quoted in Donner 1999: 85).

The Jewish religious discourse fashions an ambiguous and apparently contradictory attitude toward women: on one hand, the bipolar division of labor seals women within the private sphere, as illustrated by the traditional utterance "the honor of the Monarch's daughter is at home," but on the other, the fact that women are the only recognized nexus capable of linking the next generations to Judaism (different from Islam or Christianity) allows them to enjoy public recognition and provides them with legitimacy and authority. This characteristic is even more explicit in modern Israel, due to the analogy made between the battlefront and the birthrate, particularly while facing the hybrid features resulting from both: mothers of soldiers and, even more significantly, mothers of soldiers who fell in combat (when one of them makes an observation, "people stand still" (*Haaretz*, 05.16.02: 9b)). Furthermore, it is well-known that the Israeli mass media present a gendered bias on security items' coverage, leaving very little space for women to speak publicly – unless the opinion comes from a mother whose son is serving in the army. (Lemish & Barzel 2000: 155-59). This bias was clearly deployed when Orna Shimoni, a bereaved mother with an earlier mass-media trajectory, was transformed by journalists into the unofficial spokeswoman of Four Mothers, although she was neither a founder of the group nor a formal member.

The ethnic conspicuousness embedded within the Middle East's war scenario encourages mixed feelings of tribal allegiances and translates them into

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15 In 1920, Joseph Trumpeldor led the defense of the northern Galilee area of Tel Hai, and was killed in a battle with the Arabs. Legend has it that his dying words were, "It's good to die for our country."
military codes; this context endows women with salient characteristics oriented to support the Zionist search for legitimacy and its need of popular mobilization toward national goals. The two main representatives of the prototype "mobilized Jewish woman" were Prime Minister Golda Meir (although she was located as opposite to "the general" male figure, she cannot be seen as a feminist) and the mythical "woman-soldier," a young and sensual woman dressed in khaki fatigues, a rifle hanging from her shoulder and a slight grimace denoting her weariness. (Sharoni 1997: 144-5).

Four Mothers' success at sustaining their collective action depends on mobilization through social networks rooted in accepted cultural frames of meaning, as well as on their capacity to access critical resources, such as funding, information, and a physical and/or symbolic space from which to launch the action. Therefore, along with the calculated appropriation of key concepts from the Zionist saga, the kibbutz socialization's patterns acquired by Four Mothers' leaders played a decisive role in weaving the movement's story: they were confident of their integrity as "good" (Jewish) Israeli mothers, of carrying out their duties as militarized mothers, fulfilling their civic responsibilities to the Zionist endeavor via the kibbutz – which in turn, secured their status as patriotic citizens – and believed themselves to belong, intrinsically, to the country's epic narrative.

The "Mater Dolorosa" Becomes "Abuelas" Resistance Icon

As the Abuelas started to voice their private grievances openly, the patriarchal plot of the junta kept a seeming allegiance to the original/fundamental parameters of patriarchy. However, the basic statements of the social contract were changed into a morbid rendition, leaving women much more exposed and defenseless. (Taylor 1997: 185). Furthermore, the allegorical use of stereotypes and affiliation models linked to familial patterns and their psychological effects set the dyad "nation-state/security forces" background, providing the latter with the legitimacy to fill "the void of power" embodied by Isabelita's presidency: the rightful authority
achieved through the rhetorical appropriation of Christian and family values\textsuperscript{16} granted a public submissive approval to the coup d'état.

Within this striking context, the Abuelas' public performance of "motherhood" disrupted the elaborate efforts of the armed forces to conceive a dichotomous story of "good" and "bad" mothers: the challenge arising from the Abuelas' commitment to Life endangered the absolute power the usurpers intended to achieve through fear and crime.

Several religious representations are re-coded to fulfill political and social goals so as to reproduce collective identities; especially popular is the cult surrounding the figure of María, Mother of Jesus, who represents the ultimate model of respectful and admirable Womankind. This largely rooted belief, prevalent throughout the Latin world (and in popular culture sometimes, even detached from its religious origins) highlights maternal suffering as fundamental to feminine self-identity. (Mullinari 2000: 255-6; Feijoó 1989: 89).

A glance at the imagery settings surrounding the discursive foundations of the Abuelas also discloses a strong affinity to the Catholic precept of "sacrifice through agony" (sometimes including even corporeal torments), associated with the idea of "redemption." Left defenseless in the middle of a shattered and paralyzed civil society, lacking any constitutional support or social network aid, the Abuelas (as well as the related "Madres de Plaza de Mayo") consciously model themselves on the "Virgen María" image – not only as the ecumenical symbol she represents, but as a universal feminine icon beyond any particular belief. Thus, they transcended the private/public trust by wearing their private grief as a necklace (sometimes even carrying a large nail on their backs, as a visual expression of Jesus' self-sacrifice) while marching as in a religious procession. They saw in their own suffering the embodiment of María's tribulations as well as a role model of self-empowerment and a legitimate self-image with which to fight their battle: "We also have our Jesus," they cried, walking in circles (\textit{rondas}) around the pyramid at the Plaza de Mayo. "We personify María's suffering, although we don't

\textsuperscript{16} Illustrative of this perspective is the rhetoric used by Jorge Rafael Videla, the first president of the \textit{junta}: addressing the nation on 25 March, 1976, he claimed that "the subversives" were "raping" the society. (\textit{La Nación}, 03.26.76: 14).
even have what she had: the authorization to approach [her child] and comfort his pain." (Navarro 1989: 251).

However, the appropriation of this icon as a discursive strategy was not gratis: pain was tolerable, but only if it remained invisible. Acquiescent silence might be permissible, but no contentious actions were conceivable within the bosom of the Argentinean Church during that time. The ecclesiastical establishment (almost unanimously supporting the junta's policy) cautioned against any "manipulative attempt," intimidating the women with ostracism should they dare to use the holy image to justify their dissident behavior. As one of the Church principals, Monsignor Quarracino, commented: "I can't imagine the Virgin Mary yelling, protesting and planting seeds of hate when her son, our Lord, was torn from her hands." (Taylor 1997: 189). Although the Church reaction did not persuade most of the women to renounce what seemed to them their last and only legitimate shelter, it presented several mothers with a difficult decision to make: they were compelled to choose between their parochial affiliation as believers and their maternal commitment to learn what had happened to their disappeared beloved children and grandchildren. They continued with their search: "I could not be still. I felt I had only two options, to kill myself or to get out and search for my (three) children […] and my two daughters’ babies about to be born." (Acuña de Segarra, quoted in Arditti 1999: 85).

Given that the Abuelas' and the army's discourses both rely on the same fundamental metaphors, the exploitation the women made of the enshrined representation of "Motherhood" and the soldiers' self-image as the "fathers of the patria" are of special significance: sometimes, the indoctrination of soldiers and policemen sent to suppress the women's traditional Thursday rondas around Plaza de Mayo helped the Abuelas (and the Madres) to avoid violent reprisals. Though no other contentious groups were allowed to emerge, the women continued to hold their vigil. The soldiers could hardly gun down defenseless mothers in public. Simple questions, such as, "Aren't you embarrassed to attack a powerless mother?"

Although in Spanish 'patria' comes from the word "padre" (father), and it is ascribed to 'fatherland' as understood in German or other Anglo-Saxon languages, "patria" actually signals the representation of "Motherland" as envisioned by patriarchy. (Taylor 1997: 184).
or "Don't you have children?" were the fragile shield those older women used to confront the junta's will of blurring out the memory of the missing bodies.

**Ideology as the Designer of Contentious Strategy**

The influence of ideological baggage is widely perceived throughout the women's collective action, as the discourse analysis of both movements shows. Heritage provides the challengers with the "narrative competence" needed, as it enables them to understand and produce narrative, and by the successful demarcation of the individual linkage to a singular community – in relation to its particular set of narratives. (McQuillan 2000: 324). This legacy is reflected in the strategic choice made to employ different contentious modes of action, the language used and the selection of distinctive metaphors to express the groups' claims:

> Commitment to a particular form of knowledge predetermines the kinds of generalizations one can make about the present world, the kinds of knowledge one can have of it, and hence the kinds of projects one can legitimately conceive for changing that present or for maintaining it in its present form indefinitely. (White 1973: 21).

Decoding the ideology behind social movements' collective action reveals hidden motives, and adds important clues about the modes chosen to legitimate and reinforce their performance and goals. These are presented as going beyond the individual concerns of the actor, who now becomes the direct agent of general change. By deconstructing the mechanisms of ideology, scholars may get quite a clear definition of which social actors are more inclined to be mobilized, who the rival is, against whom actions are undertaken and of the collective goals set for struggle. Yet, an interweaving of truth and deceit is characteristic of ideological symbolic production, since it reflects "real" social relationships, but simultaneously it hides or contradicts them, as to establish the boundaries of the group's collective identity and to fulfill its need of legitimacy. (Melucci 1992: 56-9).
The ideological repertoire backing up the Four Mothers' and Abuelas' contentious discourse draws its inspiration on the experience and the substantial worldview of the women who joined the movements. The chosen narrative path is entwined with their identity-construction process – anchored within their maternal role – and it becomes stronger as their self-awareness is consolidated in their interactions within the groups themselves and with other political actors: "Women's consciousness is contingent and contextual, arising from the articulations of different dimensions of their activism and their long-term ideals and goals." (Werbner 1999: 229).

Hence, the ideological constituent reinforces the ethical dimension of Four Mothers' and Abuelas' stories, already achieved via the appropriation of core patriarchal symbols and by upholding traditional codes that are inherent to their (ethnic and/or national) social community.

"If I Am Not for Me, Who Is for Me?" Urgency as an Ideological Expression

From Aristotle to Burke, it is well-acknowledged that an unfilled expectation or one that became reversed due to some unforeseen obstacles is the ideal trigger to start a narrative. Aristotle called it "peripeteia," Burke, "trouble with a capital 'T'." (Bruner 2002: 17, 28). In other words, a story is begun when there is a feeling that a slit is opened between "the actual situation" and the one the teller has anticipated. Through the story, there is an attempt to bridge the gap.

Bruner's comment provides insight into the attempt to reveal the narrative progression of events responsible for combining the feeling of an existential threat (a feeling that was common to both movements, due to their interpretation of the national situation as jeopardizing their ability to legitimately fulfill their role as "Life-keepers") and the acknowledgement that there is no way to fix the situation other than taking their private concerns to the public stage as autonomous political actors. This assertion can clarify why a traditionally non-political group decides to promote collective actions that disrupt the hegemonic discourse, despite the fact that the "entrance fee" to the public domain is quite restrictive –
even risky – and involves a high level of uncertainty. For the Abuelas, for example, joining the group meant endangering their own lives:

> We received many threats over the phone. On another occasion (...) I received a letter saying that I too would disappear any moment. But after what had happened to us, after they took away the best that we had, our children, I had to disregard those threats.

(Antonia Acuña de Segarra, quoted in Arditti 1999: 61).

Even if not all the examples occurred under such extreme conditions, a common feature found in the decision to participate in contentious movements under high-risk conditions is the lack of thought to benefit/cost considerations. Seen from this analytical dimension, "risk" is very different from "cost," since it targets the anticipated dangers – legal, social, physical, economic, etc. – of engaging in a particular type of action, and the option of not taking the risk is seen as more certain to imperil the self of the actor. Paradoxically, then, "self-sacrificing" is perceived by the participants themselves as "self-saving."

An episode centering not on the physical integrity but the public image of the participant can illustrate the extent of this assertion: although signing a petition in a democratic country is usually cost-free and safe, it may be risky, since it may jeopardize the status of the recruited supporter. Such was the case, in January 1998, of the wife of Amiram Levin (then the IDF head of the Northern Command), who signed a Four Mothers petition in the northern city of Kiryat Shmona, calling for a complete – and if necessary unilateral – withdrawal of all IDF troops from South Lebanon. The Mothers realized this was an extraordinary publicity opportunity and deliberately released the "juicy" information to the press. A vivid polemic quickly ensued over whether or not "the wife of" (a prominent IDF official) had the right to be an activist and whether her behavior can harm soldiers' morale. (Yedioth Ahronoth, 01.07.98: 5).

As McAdam's "Freedom Summer" camp research from 1964 has shown, it is feasible to conclude that participants in high-risk activism are expected to (a)
have a "history of activism" and a truthful commitment to the ideology and the goals of the movement; (b) belong to some activist network, and (c) be as free as possible of personal constraints, otherwise those limitations may endanger their participation. (McAdam 1986: 64, 67-88; Loveman 1998: 477-9). Clearly, both groups studied here fit pattern (c), despite their differences: most of the Abuelas were old enough to be retired, while Four Mothers was made up almost wholly by kibbutz members, part-time working mothers or professionals.

However, the attempt to find any correspondence between the participants' profiles and the first two parameters mentioned above requires some complementary analysis, since their "history of activism" or earlier "belonging to some activist network" may not necessarily refer to political involvement beyond the normal interactions that occur within their personal social circles (and in this matter I include within "normal interactions" those performed within the kibbutz's collective framework, since cooperative patterns, as revolutionary as they may sound elsewhere are routine on kibbutz life). Nonetheless, I hold that the leaders' profiles do match these characteristics: a family's primordial relationship and the values embedded within the mother/child tie (unconditional commitment, concern, self-sacrifice and altruism) have been translated into directive terms, analogical constituents of the praxis and the (physical and symbolic) means of action. Thus, the women overcame their "amateurish political skills" as they had always handled family problems (that is, by "doing"); this expertise gave the women the possibility to surmount a handicap, provided them with the essential tools to build up their strategy. As Sonia Torres recalls, looking back on their first desperate attempts to find out what had happened to their missing grandchildren: "One learns by doing. We didn't know what to do until we started doing it." (Arditti 1999: 79).

The testimony of Chiche (another Abuelas grandmother) reveals the odd linkage created by these women, between their lack of political skills and their urgent need "to do something" based on their maternal improvisation expertise: "That day, I realized that we were capable of doing things that we could never
have imagined. We all knew that we were risking our lives. But there was no other way." (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo 1997: 87).

The same sense of urgency in performing an action that could reverse the situation also appears as a central motif in the Four Mothers' narrative: "I rose to action with an intense feeling that there is no other alternative left. I felt I must do something." (Hakibbutz, 04.03.97: 12). The description ("I rose to action") can be interpreted as a sign of her passage from passive behavior to more determined activism. This state of mind allows her to transform a pessimistic assertion – that in other situations could be understood as paralyzing ("there is no other alternative left") – into a lever. This same force pushed Lea Horowitz, who joined Four Mothers in 1998 without her family's knowledge (because she did not want to harm the morale of her soldier sons), to write a personal letter to then-defense minister Yitzhak Mordechai: "Sir, my twin boys are based in South Lebanon. I cannot bear this situation." The news of another boy killed in Lebanon (Eyal, Orna Shimoni's son) triggered her action; she wrote Mordechai that she could not understand why Israel was still in Lebanon since it was clear that sooner or later the army would have to withdraw, and every day endangers more young lives. She delivered her letter personally to the Ministry of Defense. That night, Mordechai called her at home, and tried to allay her anxiety. He told her that US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was conducting diplomatic talks with the Syrians in an attempt to achieve an accord. (http://www.ynet.co.il).

Another example that shows the evolving mechanisms behind this new identity-definition process can be found in Miri's story:

My son, who was recently conscripted, was born a short time before Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's visit to Israel, in 1977. I remember nursing him while watching TV, at the very moment the Egyptian plane landed […] I remember that I started to cry because of the dramatic event, and I kept crying the whole time the TV was broadcasting from the airport. And I said to him: my beloved child, you will not have to go to the army. (Hakibbutz, 04.03.97: 12).
Sadat's historical visit is not recalled in a precise manner, but only in reference to her son's birth. The most dramatic diplomatic event to take place in Israel since it won independence was detached from her immediate emotion, kept as an ornamental background on TV – while the "real" action relates to her breast-feeding. In other words, the historical importance of the moment has been completely privatized and its range is measured by the expected impact on her son's life. Miri's present disappointment and the feeling that "reality" brought her to break her maternal promise appear later in the text: "That's it: reality has struck my face. I feel that I cannot stand by, I cannot stay at home and do nothing." *(Hakibbutz, 04.03.97: 12).*

The distress of realizing that even though she had fulfilled her duty (giving birth to healthy male babies, nurturing them with care, coaching them to be "good citizens"), the country had cheated her; Israel had broken "the contract" between them. This overwhelming realization pushed Miri to become involved in contentious practices: she joined Four Mothers in order to challenge what she came to identify as the responsibility of her unfaithfulness.

In both movements the discursive wording is expressed through a reversal of meaning: if the "death" motif claims the most prominent place in the military discourse – as in the Zionist warfare narrative or in the much more deviant nuance developed by the *junta*\(^\text{18}\) – the Mothers' fixed screenplay preserves "Life" as the superior category, redefining the individual/nation relationship. Hence, the sense of urgency that pushed the Abuelas to risk even their own lives searching for their disappeared grandchildren, or that of the Four Mothers trying to avoid the imminent "potential bereavement" that threatened them. They were driven by an ethic to do "the right thing," according to the beliefs and principles absorbed during their socialization training as daughters, wives and mothers. Both narratives rely on discursive trends deeply rooted within their nations' imagery: the independentist discourse relating the heroic struggle against Spanish colonialism –

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\(^{18}\) Reaching terrifying degrees of insanity, such as Brigadier General Ibérico Manuel Saint-Jean, the governor of Buenos Aires, who openly declared, paraphrasing Brecht: "First, we will kill the subversives; then we will kill their collaborators; then their sympathizers; then the indifferent and finally, the timids" *(Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo web site).*
La Cruzada Libertadora – and the utopist cooperative ideals of the Zionist pioneers, pillar of modern Israel's metanarrative.

These two ethical systems molded both movements' ideology, as well as the interpretative framework applied to decode (and fight back) the reality that confronts them.

**The "Libertario" Discourse**

Catherine Kohler Riessman argues that the individual is naturally inclined to construct modes of actions and/or past events based on his/her personal narrative, and then to achieve particular identities that would assure a more coherent articulation of his/her life. (Kohler Riessman 1993: 2).

This assertion basically focuses the analysis of the duel between the junta's and the human rights movement's narratives during the dictatorship regime, toward the national imagery that stems from a mythological/historical libertarian past. The Abuelas were not indifferent to this: the entrenched repertoire of the "Libertario" discourse, representing the mythical freedom fighters (from the legendary Mariano Moreno to Nobel Peace Laureate Perez Esquivel) invigorated the Plaza de Mayo every Thursday afternoon. Through widely respectful "federal red and blue colors" decorated the placards and slogans the older women carried to the Plaza, they remained true to their battle to rescue their missing children, despite the opprobrium of their being treated as traitors and subversives. They challenged the brutal military regime by confronting the massive propaganda machine with a counter-narrative that made visible the vanished, a restitution/reappropriation of the latest link in the tragic chain of Argentinean freedom fighters:

In a world in which "naming" is becoming the equivalent of "bringing to existence," the weakness of actors is too often a deprivation or deformation.

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19 One of the most outstanding figures of the May Revolution against the Spanish domination and its most radical spokesman. He was extremely influenced by Voltaire, Rousseau and Diderot and he embraced Suarez and Mariana's doctrine, two rebel Jesuits who, simultaneous to Locke, wrote on the right to oppose tyranny. The unrevealed cause of Moreno's early and mysteriously death confirmed him as "the first martyr" after the independence of Argentina.
of the power of naming. The flow of signs is meaningless, if there is no access to the dominant codes. A contract could not exist without being preceded by a restitution/reappropriation of the power over languages and codes." (Melucci 1992: 55).

This restitution of naming/connecting between the heroic challengers against the Spanish oppression and the current protesters, victimized for the same ideals, implies the recognition of a Jacobin interpretation of the liberal metanarrative. Thus, a radical reading of the French and the American revolutionary legacy can be found through Argentinean history: after almost two centuries, the famous speech by Mariano Moreno in August 1810[^20] – declaring that the use of violence is legitimate if it is to consolidate the revolutionary ideals – was invoked again by the new generations.

Although the "disappeared" embraced this radical version – tragically engaging themselves into a devastating zero-sum game – the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, together with the Madres de Plaza de Mayo–Línea Fundadora, deliberately chose a broader interpretation of their maternal mission as their contentious language. They added a liberal agenda to their unique political platform, including the defense of human rights, and, in fact, rejected any form of violence to achieve their goals. The maternal self-sacrifice motif was thus amplified thanks to the pathos seeping from the tragic story of the nation's legendary independentist leaders.

The combination of core values drawn from maternal practice together with the liberal acknowledge that every human being has a fundamental right to be free, to have an individual identity and to be his/her own master (as expressed by Nozick) (Jeske 1996: 139), sustained a unique strategy within the symbolic boundaries demarcating the routinely political (male-oriented) discourse and offered a counterplot based on a democratic reading of the "Libertario" discourse. The implementation of this new perspective allowed the mothers and the

[^20]: "None of us should be outraged by the voices calling to decapitate our adversaries, encouraging to spill their blood and to sacrifice whatever is necessary in order to crystallize the revolutionary will." (http://www.todo-argentina.net/biografias)
grandmothers to bind themselves to the national historical continuum. This provided them with the moral support and the legitimacy they could not find elsewhere to continue their desperate battle for Life.

**Individual Strife or Ideological Collectivism? The Pioneers' Zionist Discourse and the Mothers' Struggle**

The national Zionist project "imagined" the community's citizenship boundaries and the nature of the link to the nation itself on an ethnic-cultural base. On account of the state of belligerence between Jews and Arabs, the limits of civic allegiance were designed with both warfare and conflict management in mind; both components display the kind of ties each citizen may or may not develop toward the country, and the level of participation s/he is allowed to achieve. Based on this insight, the Zionist paraphernalia was tailored to assure Jews a distinct political representation and, therefore, its whole political configuration was rooted in types of ethnic settlement. (Helman 1999: 297-8).

Due to this state of affairs – and the fact that Israel still lacks recognized frontiers – the social organizations developed to endorse the dominant ethnosc's real estate plan (especially over peripheral areas) gained vast civic recognition. Furthermore, the citizenship configuration based on republican standards (the granting of rewards depending on a contribution to the collective) greatly benefited the political opportunity structure21 of the kibbutz. Seen as the most remarkable synthesis existing in the settlement enterprise and the territorial defense organization, the kibbutz movement (as well as each of its members), was warmly included into the national consensus, winning a place of honor within the Zionist metanarrative.

The unique socialization processes that characterized the kibbutz's social and economical distinctive structure had a great impact on the delineation of Four Mothers' collective action:

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21 I refer to Political Opportunity Structure as "consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent or national – dimensions of the political environment which either encourage or discourage people from using collective action." (Tarrow 1995:18).
The leaders' self-image of "the pioneer before the crowd" and their clear identification as "mainstream" provided a legitimate life buoy, able to keep them safe from exclusion;

- The existence of an egalitarian lifestyle based on the principle that all members at the community are equally valued, nullified any gendered bias and allowed males to participate even in decision-making under the label of "Motherhood";

- The historical linkage between the kibbutz movement and the army bypassed many communication barriers, providing unofficial accessibility to vital information and resources, while increasing the possibility of recruiting supporters from the adversary camp (retired officers, members of the kibbutz movement), who added their expertise to the mothers' calls for unilateral withdrawal from South Lebanon;

- The rooted catchphrase of "homeland frontiers' defense" that was inherent to the Zionist settlement project and was widely identified with the kibbutz movement granted the mothers the moral right to demand the "immediate return of all mothers sons home."

The alliance of "the wheat stalk and the sword" – representing the pioneer tilling the ground and the fighter defending his land – is deeply interwoven within the Zionist ethos and has a sure place on the historical continuum of the Jewish nation. Each kibbutz became the tangible translation of strength, self-defense and determination. This legendary image was embodied in the Palmach, the first regular Jewish army (and precursor to the IDF), based on a dual platform of self-realization gained on kibbutz and the completion of intense military training. (Donner 1999: 87). Therefore, the identification with the kibbutz movement supplied Four Mothers with an unquestionable narrative authority, imbued with a strong sense of being "the most-trusted emissary" for the job. Furthermore, this

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22 The pre-state distribution of the kibbutzim to an extent determined the country's borders. The northern cease-fire line of 1949, for example, extends from Rosh Hanikra, on the Mediterranean Sea, to Menara, Kfar Giladi, Dan, Kfar Blum and Gadot; kibbutzim mark all these locales (and three members of Four Mothers are former or present members of Kibbutz Gadot).
affiliation allowed the Mothers to overcome traditional gender divisions – commonly found in other new social movements initiated solely by women – and to recruit male partners who, were it not for their common kibbutz connection, would have logically been identified with the opponent camp.

As mothers of combat soldiers, and as border residents, proudly defending with their own bodies the national frontiers, Four Mothers successfully gained legitimacy among the Jewish-Israeli public.

It is important to recall, however, that the Mothers' struggle was borne of private grievances and their collective action essentially obeyed personal interests. Still, their strategy was built upon dominant cultural parameters, expressing collective ritual practices.

The shift from an abstract representation ("members' within the "collective") to the physical appropriation of the collective legitimacy to a private level, where the individual is allowed to voice his/her complaint indicates an ideological process in which the homogeneous collective language no longer fits exclusively national goals, but acknowledges sectorial social agents, thereby expanding communication options. However, the practical implications of the privatization of maternal feelings – that is, the specific perspective of "mothers of combat soldiers serving in special units" – left the kibbutz movement per se outside Four Mothers' parameters. And yet, the kibbutz as an institution remained the movement's main logistic buttress. This role, though restrained, was critical to the Mothers' goal of a non-partisan political discourse that could transcend the traditional schisms of Israeli society.

The Mothers' adaptation of constituent representations is intrinsically related to the legitimate foundations of the Zionist repertoire, making plausible the participation of vast segments of the population, afraid neither of disrupting the continuity of the national narrative nor of sabotaging the dominant social order. Four Mothers' appeasing attitude and the fact that their claim remained within the boundaries of the consensus became a strategic central stake in their contentious discourse. Diverse sectors that joined the Mothers' struggle (former soldiers and officers, even some politicians) found in them a way to circumvent the political
isolation that had always greeted all foreign policy dissenters in Israel. Catch phrases such as, "It's possible and it's necessary to leave Lebanon," distributed on flyers by activists in June and July 1997 illustrate this new political trend. On the same flyer it said: "Four Mothers crosses political and social boundaries. In our hearts is the belief that citizens' good will might permeate the sealed chambers of the decision-makers' and change the course of history." (Four Mothers archives).

The Mothers' struggle called for a new and wider public consensus based on the only issue capable of winning the support of all women, regardless of party preference or annual income: the primordial maternal demand to "preserve Life." This demand left no room for negotiations, so central to the game of politics. In addition, their physical presence encouraged participants to reject the political model of "benefits vs. costs," and adopt instead a model based on "altruistic sacrifice."

Like the Abuelas in Argentina, Four Mothers – without consciously intending to break down the patriarchal social order – caused fundamental changes to women's societal representation and to their self-image. They found they were capable of converting their structural weakness into a very reliable weapon, bringing with it a new definition of the private and public sphere. (Feijoó 1989: 76).
The tremendous changes that have shaped Western societies since the XIX century underlay – and enabled – women's involvement in the public sphere, which in turn brought staunch opposition as well as emancipation. The first open signs of women's civil consciousness were trapped by their own differentiated socialization process and monolithic male resistance, reflecting men's reluctance to voluntarily release their monopoly on public affairs. The first attempts at a new discourse did not resist any objection to the dichotomic separation between "private" and "public" (until the emergence of the feminist movement, and the coining of the provocative assertion: "The personal is political"), though women actively tried to augment their traditional social function by instrumental means. That is to say, the initial struggle was not meant to make any advance towards egalitarianism – at least, not on purpose. (Staggenborg 1997: 6-9).

As the maternal political identity gained strength, the possibility of transforming patriarchal "M-Otherhood" into an autonomous actor capable of shaking off social constraints also increased. However, this emplotment destabilized aspects of the modern metanarrative: by acknowledging the failures inherent to the rational approach (which translates all social interactions into "means and ends" calculations), it became feasible to move toward alternative patterns, more competent at understanding different nuances in motivation and collective action. Put another way, several scholars of social movements have shown that the higher the perceived level of the collective identity, the higher the
level of the individual's commitment to it. (Melucci 1992: 52-3; Snow & McAdam 2000: 49).\textsuperscript{23}

Thus, the hierarchic order obtained through the manifestation of different identities populating the "self" (individual or collective) creates a distinct narrative space in which "odd" elements such as:

Emotions, intuition and creativity, the "feminine" perception of the world, can also become legitimate elements of the process through which social reality is constructed. This means acknowledging their role in social action and not attempting to hide their presence. (Melucci 1992: 52-3).

"The Yell that Begot a Movement"

The heightened sense of "potential mourning," after almost two decades of war, was a central motif on Four Mothers' contentious repertoire. The mothers of "living soldiers – for the time being" finally allowed the maternal yell to rise from deep within. In so doing, they confronted the Israeli public with a mirror that reflected a hidden face of the conflict: that of the "threatened parents." The exposure of some vacuous "ceremonial deliberations," as revealed by the Mothers' readings of Israeli reality, released them (and their sons) from the vain reproduction of a show that was staged only to hide and repress the fear from bereavement. References to this were raised several times in public declarations, interviews and flyers during the Mothers' campaign. Sometimes the Mothers played the emissary role for their sons: in one instance, a mother repeats her son's comment after reading the long list of soldiers killed in the helicopter crash: "Mom, it seems the time for my [peers'] tribute to this land has finally arrived." (Hakibbutz, 04.03.97: 13). The Mothers' "privatized" perception of the social reality can also be traced in relation to their deconstruction practices of national myths, due to the connotation those

\textsuperscript{23} Tarrow's insight clearly backs up his colleagues' approach, whilst highlighting the claim that "movement participation is not only politicizing – it is empowerment, both in the psychological sense of increasing the willingness to take risks, and the political one of gaining new skills and broadened perspectives." (Tarrow 1995: 174).
have on their sons' lives: "On one hand, [there are] all the myths about Zionism, the nation and the military; on the other, I'm telling myself: what the hell are all those games about? Your son's life is in danger, you are his mother, save him!" (Ma'ariv, Weekend supplement, 12.04.98: 18).

This interpretative framework offered a different experience of what was happening on the social ground and the kind of interpersonal interactions taking place there; it suggested a new understanding of the relationship between the individual and the state ("I'm here in order to prevent your visit to my home," one concerned mother told the president at a Four Mothers rally in front of his home). (Ma'ariv, Weekend supplement, 12.04.98: 18).

In an effort to employ an alternative political language, different from the military discourse, Four Mothers has continuously reiterated the movement's primordial commitment to Life as opposed to the war fixation prevailing among the decision-makers. The mothers insist on exposing the non-necessity of the war and the "non-kosher" relationship between military careers and political promotions: "Statesmen silence the home front by a systematic offering of our sons to that Moloch, Lebanon. They are sending our sons abroad to silence and anesthetize Israeli public opinion." (Hakibbutz, 04.03.97: 13).

Nevertheless, despite their criticism of the enormous influence the military has on the political echelons, they were careful not to cross the thin line between their specific claim – the immediate withdrawal from Lebanon – and a broader call for insurrection against the IDF as an institution and/or against its representatives:

This is not a land that devours its residents; it is a land that abandons its children. The same generals that brought us to Lebanon then are our leaders today.

This anomaly that a general takes off his uniform but instead of becoming president of the local tennis club becomes a political leader, keeps us stuck in an eternal non-peace situation. Those generals, I'm sure, are all good people but they also are people for whom warfare is a way of
life. They can't turn 180 degrees and take another direction." (Ma'ariv, Weekend supplement, 03.05.99: 14).

Four Mothers insisted on collective leadership and local autonomy, rejecting the "democratic centralism" framework common to the Left, or the top-down leadership of the liberal parties. They developed a non-hierarchical, loosely structured communications network and a consensus form of decision making that stressed process and inclusion instead of debate and antagonism.

One of the most outstanding victories of the movement's popular mobilization was the inclusion of bereaved parents into its ranks. As a group, bereaved parents had not previously intervened in public discussions or used their social label to lend legitimacy to any individual demand. Moreover, as a result of the Mothers' inclusionary policy, non-Jewish citizens also found a place to express their particular perspective. This was the case of Mag'd Khazamel, a Druze father from the village of Beit Jann, who lost his son in the 1997 helicopter crash. Despite the Druze belief in reincarnation, Khazamel and his wife found within this movement the comfort they were seeking after their tragedy and a way to deal with the grieving by interacting with a supportive group that did not care that they were not Jews.

As they were developing a deep solidarity with the (already) mourning families, Four Mothers succeeded in bringing their contentious collective practices to the public space, vocally refusing to accept their potential "one-way ticket" to sorrow and grief. As one mother explained:

A few days ago, I visited the mourning mothers' tent in front of the President's House, in Jerusalem. I stayed about half a day and went back home completely hysterical. I couldn't drive. I swore to myself that this is one club I would never join. It was like touching the scorched edges of

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24 See the wide support the Mothers received even from Arab members of Knesset. For example, the protest voiced in the Knesset (02.23.2000) by MK Barake (Hadash) following the ignominious comments made to the media by one of the Golani Brigade's highest officers against Four Mothers. MK Aiub Kara (Likud) voiced a similar complaint during that session (number 1997 on the committee's protocol). (Four Mothers Archives).
madness. I'll do whatever it takes to avoid becoming a member of this club. It's the essence of horror. (Ma'ariv, 03.05.99: 14).

Four Mothers did not remain indifferent to the perception of "social" time either: the movement promoted a different calculation of calendar days (starting with the beginning of the war) and a naming of the years (based on events opposing the war). This approach could be found on leaflets and placards, for example at the protest tent outside the Prime Minister's Residence, when Benjamin Netanyahu was leader of the country, in August 1998: "Jubilee = bereavement" and "In Lebanon there is never a recess, how you [Netanyahu and the other legislators] dare to take one." (Ma'ariv, Weekend supplement, 12.04.98: 18).

Another interesting facet of the Mothers' decoding and appropriation of representations taken from popular imagery is their weaving in of Jewish tradition. Seeking a wider legitimate basis for their actions, the Mothers did not hesitate to adapt verses from the Bible, especially from the "anti-establishment" Book of Prophets. Take, for example, the commentary written by the group's chairwoman, Rachel Ben-Dor:

And the Four Mothers movement shall tell the People: remember this day because on this day thou left Lebanon and slavery, because in strength we shall leave Lebanon […] And ye shall tell your sons on that day: we are doing everything we can to take thee out of there. And so we remember, the demonstrations, the meetings within the country and abroad to stress the Peace Blessing coming from our mouth, because in strength we shall take the People of Israel out of Lebanon.

And if your son shall ask, What hast thou done while I was fighting in this endless war, thou shall say to him, I cried "Four, who knows?" – "Four, I know – four mothers took us out from Lebanon with strength, from slavery. As Jeremiah said to Rachel, crying amongst her sons: […]

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25 In Hebrew, "yovel=evel."
26 Besides, of course, the obvious and advantageous link between the chosen movement's name and the biblical "Four Mothers," Sarah, Leah, Rebbecc and Rachel.
"Thus spoke God:
Prevent your voice from crying and your eyes from weeping
There is a reward for your actions, the words of God
And they returned from the enemy's land
And there is hope in your longing, the words of God
And the sons returned to their frontiers."

(Four Mothers archives, Passover 1999).

New social movements' activists typically limit their contentious actions to the parameters of their own platform. "A social conflict [is] defined and demarked by common cultural conditions which are recognized by all the contenders." (Touraine 1981: 142). Four Mothers employed agreed-on social and cultural devices acknowledging their socialization as Israeli-Jewish mothers. Thus, if a concept such as "self-salvation" is considered outrageous in the Jewish glossary (redemption is possible only if all the world's Jews are ready to embrace the religious precepts), it seems "natural" that Four Mothers would care not only about their sons but about all sons, thus recreating through their argot ancient Jewish values such as responsibility toward the "Other" and community's reciprocal concern.

Still on the Jewish tradition/religion axis, I find of special significance the fact that the Four Mothers Western Galilee branch rewrote the Passover Haggada (the book recounting the Exodus from Egypt). Though not in itself unprecedented, the group used their new version as part of an invitation to the public to join them for the festive Passover meal – the "Seder" – at a frontier post, in 1999. Interpreting a new version of the "Four Sons" tale in the Haggada – the clever son, the evil one, the naïve one and the son who does not know how to ask – Roni, one of the organizers, recited:

27 Paraphrasing a 'midrash,' the Jewish commentaries widely quoted in the Talmud.
28 Several social Jewish groups have seen in this written but basically oral piece of tradition an excellent device to express their own innovative message, whilst keeping intact the flow of the nation's imagery within the ritual configuration of its reading.
On Sons this Seder deals, and on Mothers who could no longer wait for their sons' questions and went out to ask themselves, looking for answers and trying to influence those who rule.

In 50 years of independence, "security," that magic word, was absolutely male. [...] Women, like the "naïve" son or the one "who does not know how to ask," [gave] the "clever" sons (and even the "evil" ones) the right to make decisions about our destiny; they have revered the Security god – male, self-confident, invulnerable and powerful. No longer.

(Four Mothers archives).

In contrast to the original Haggada text, this one encourages the metamorphosis of weakness into (emancipated) authority. It places women – absent in the original – in a commanding role, imbuing them not only with the "power to ask" but also with the authority to demand answers, and even to influence others. Shifting the story's weight from the "clever" and the "evil" (the main characters in the original tale) toward the "naïve" and the "one who does not know how to ask" gives added meaning: the Mothers' choice discloses the recognition of a shared structural handicap that they share with the latter two sons; this is how they rationalize their absence in the original version. In contrast, the characters of the "clever" and the "evil" sons are now partially blurred, their voices drowned out offstage. Highlighting their presence here would be of no value, as they embody the entrenched patriarchal view, hanging onto the "security threat," while the Mothers choose challenge (even if it entails some danger) for their alternative narrative attempt:

Let us raise a third glass to the withdrawal from Lebanon, to courage and chance. The courage to leave a situation which cannot be resolved by force, toward a new path of hopeful prospects for us and our sons, even if it may look frightening. To Life – and Opportunity!

(Four Mothers archives).
On Identity, Kinship and Restitution

The tormented search for any records on the "disappeared" and the terrible grief deeply undermined and eroded families' stability. (CoNaDep 1985: 332).

The official kidnapping/disappearance policy was aimed at ensuring the acquiescence of civilians and to stifle any form of insurgency. These state-terrorist practices chart the maze of personal processing and decoding mechanisms, as people desperately tried to find any logic to the tragic events that were shaking their private realm: even though in the first stages after a kidnapping/disappearance of a child, both parents usually got involved, most of the fathers recoiled from the search journey later. The reasons for this male desertion lie mainly in the gendered division of work characteristic to patriarchy: some of the men understood that there was nothing to do in the face of the mighty unreceptiveness of the new authorities; others, rationally, concluded that pushing "too far" could be dangerous to other members of the family, especially their job security, or might even harm any chance the "disappeared" still had. For the Mothers', the opposite was true: instead of sealing themselves within their traditional subservience and passivity, their reaction was visceral and brought many of them to exercise their maternal role as autonomous political actors. This switch from private grieving to collective action reinforced the women and increased their self-esteem, creating a sort of magnetism that worked as a moral incentive:

"I think that men are not as resilient as women. Many people ask us, where were the men? I believe this has something to do with the ability to stand pain. Men do not have the strength that women have. (...) Mothers do not give up, they keep looking for them. They want the whole world to know what happened to their children. My husband died after two years because he could not take it any more. I know many cases of men who died because of their enormous grief. (Quesada, in Arditti 1999: 96)."
The stereotyped dichotomy between male and feminine behavior patterns became the Abuelas' leitmotif and the foundations of their long-term commitment, as shown in Emilia's comment:

Our work is like the ant’s work, like housework, very slow, every day, little things that pile up. You don’t see it while it is happening but after many years the children are grown, the house is in order. Men are more impatient, they want to fight, to get results right away. Women are more resilient, [they] are in for the long haul. (Miranda, in Arditti 1999: 96).

Very often, political mothers referring to inter-personal contacts and/or the perception of "Otherness" find themselves gathering around some mutual pain. This is also the case of the Abuelas: their behavior corresponds to the patriarchal attributes of motherhood, especially those regarding the preservation of Life. Yet, the great degree of self-commitment and the passion they pour into their struggle reveal a sub-plot underlying the main text at a more personal level; by means of the goals they pursued, they restored to themselves the ancestral earthly tie to their womb's offspring – the one later usurped by the husband's lineage. Thus, the kidnapped grandchild is seen, within the group's self-constructed imagery, as a bleeding wound in which each drop drains the "self" from its constitutive identity, avoiding them from cherishing the real proof of their physical continuity. (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo 1997: 290; Swerdlow 1993: X).

This identity definition of the Abuelas – based on their primordial ties – and the restitution of the children's identity were the foundational basis of their struggle. It was clear to the Abuelas that in a national scenario where the government controls every single detail, through violence if it deems it necessary, the practice of stealing children could easily become legal adoption. Accordingly, they centered their political action on the children's right to retrieve their true identity. Their contentious action on this matter was instrumental and essential both: they succeeded to focus on the "disappeared alive" ("desaparecidos con vida") and their right to one's identity. Through their own elder bodies, the Abuelas
(and at this point, also the Madres) show the absence/presence of all those who disappeared without a trace. They responded to the military spectacle with one of their own that thrived on inverting the focus: they became "visible" political actors instead of remaining "invisible" housewives – so "visible" that even when it was forbidden to them to come to the Plaza, they painted white kerchiefs around the pyramid there, recalling their walking path. They insisted on demonstrating publicly that the "disappeared" had names, faces, a Life – while the military attempted to make their victims anonymous, dumping their bodies into the sea or burying them in mass graves, anywhere, everywhere, while keeping their progeny as war booty. In contrast to the military reluctance to admit the facts, the Abuelas inscribed the exact place, time and the date of the disappearances; the women challenged the generals' claim on history by writing themselves and the "disappeared" into the narrative, literally as well as figuratively. (Taylor 1997: 189-190).

Due to their unbeatable spirit, the Abuelas succeeded to break the isolation of Argentinean human rights' organizations, opening channels with the outer world. Their collective action on behalf of a child's right to identity won the attention of several Western NGOs, which provided them with financial and moral support, while promoting a revision of the implications of demarking identity boundaries within the nation-state metanarrative. Their struggle focused on three main themes: the medical-psychological, the political-legislative and the genetic-biological.

Under enormous stress ("Every hour is another hour that our stolen grandchildren are forced to live with a fabricated identity") and aware that their own biological clock was not making things easier, the Abuelas bet on an inclusionary, non-hierarchical structure and on professional support. (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo 1997: 37). Their concern about all facets of the restitution process and the expected trauma the children would experience after discovering that their lives were a fake (together with the striking knowledge that those who usurped the parental role were involved somehow in the disappearance of the child's biological parents) led them to recruit psychologists, sociologists and
anthropologists and to organize multidisciplinary teams. The Abuelas primary working assumption was opposite to the captors': their departure point was that the child is the "subject" and not the "object." Therefore, they always made tremendous efforts to approach each case independently (since there is a possibility that the adoptive parents received the child in good faith; in those cases there is room for the adoptive family to participate in the restitution process, without cutting the ties completely), while supplying the youngsters with all the available resources to cope with this stressful situation, helping them to overcome the psychological barriers that blocked memories, familiar smells, forgotten lullabies, toys or any other artifact or sensation that may recall their origins.

Abuelas won remarkable success abroad as their story ignited the debate on the ethical and political aspects of children's rights in several international forums. Even though they did not achieve the UN consent about explicitly labeling the junta's crimes as "genocide," in 1991 the UN Human Rights' permanent assembly added a clause to the definition (paragraph II, article "e") declaring that the appropriation of children in order to get them from one group to another, without their consent, should be considered a genocide practice (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo web site).

Another international front with the Abuelas imprint dealt with the revision of the legal framework related to children's rights. The political kidnapping of children was first debated at the OAS annual human rights' assembly in 1978 (the deliberations appear under resolution 3459). Their "ant's work," speaking with each one of the delegations and a public appeal, which aroused sincere waves of solidarity and compassion, made possible the redaction of articles 7, 8 and 11, included in the final declaration. This document finally won approval on 11.20.89, at the UN General Assembly. (see Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo web site; Arditti 1999: 145-9). Since Argentina also agreed to be a signatory to the document (incorporated into the Argentine National Constitution by Law No. 23849), the Abuelas achieved a beneficial tactical win on their attempt to change the legislation on adoptions, including lessening the confidentiality cloak around
the procedure. This victory also represented the possibility of expanding their search across other countries in the area, countries that were known to be participants of a former network of dictatorships that implemented deceptive adoption procedures in order to reward "loyal" families. In this matter, the group's legendary president, summarizes their contribution:

Here, people think of us as "seekers of identity." Abroad, Article 8 of the Convention is called "the Argentine article" because we fought for it. We, supported by many people in Argentine society and even in the government, succeeded in incorporating it to our Constitution. And it was not only Article 8, but also Articles 7 and 11, articles that speak of the right of children to be themselves, to have their family and identity, and how the state has the obligation to restore it to them. Article 11 states that children who were taken illegally from their country of origin must be returned to that country. So, there is support for the return of the children who were taken abroad, those "second disappearances" carried out by the military, the police, or their accomplices. (Estela de Carlotto, in Arditti 1999: 147-8).

Although Raúl Alfonsín (elected president after democracy was restored in 1983) asked the Congress to approve a law that should limit to a period of (only) two months the possibility of presenting demands against the military ("Ley de Punto Final," achieved by the army after a failed coup), anyone involved in murdering, raping or kidnapping children was not included in the presidential amnesty. This gesture was widely interpreted as recognition of the Abuelas' determination.

The progress made in genetic research is one of the most outstanding outcomes of the Abuelas' work and a great example of international solidarity. Worried about the possibility of being unable to prove to whom a stolen child

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29 To this extent, the case of Carmen Sanz is a good example: on 29 March, 2004, a verdict was handed down at La Plata (a city next to Buenos Aires) against the former chief of the Buenos Aires' intelligence services and a doctor, who was found guilty of "whitening" kidnapped babies by signing the documentation as they were delivered by the adoptive mothers themselves. The national authorities instructed that all the official files related to Carmen's birth, including those kept in the Police Dept. archives be changed to reflect the true facts of her birth. The penalty was 7 years in jail and 14 years of professional licence suspension. (La Nación, electronic edition, 03.30.04).
may have belonged, the women's efforts attracted the attention of a few genetic and blood experts in the US. A team was put together, which succeeded to develop a scientific tool capable of establishing a 99.95 percent genetic compatibility based only on the grandparents' genetic data (known as "indice de abuelidad" in honor of the group). (Arditti 1999: 69-72).

Another contribution of the linkage between the Abuelas and medical technology was the creation of a DNA bank that should collect relevant genetic data from the relatives of all the "disappeared." The Abuelas, together with other human rights NGOs from Argentina and abroad, launched a huge campaign stressing the need for an adequate legislation which would compel any persons implicated to undergo blood tests to clarify genetic ties. Alfonsín's government finally accepted the challenge and the Ley Nacional n°. 23,511 was approved by the Congress in May 1987 (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo web site). That year, the first little girl (born in captivity) was rescued and restored to her biological family thanks to the information now stored at the National Bank of Genetic Data. Although its buildings have been the targets of sabotage, the data bank still operates, and is meant to do so until 2050, providing a ray of hope to the families and answers to any youngsters who might doubt their origins. (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo 1997: 115-6; Arditti 1999: 73). In 1992, as a result of a petition made by Abuelas, the Argentinean government created the National Committee for the Right to Identity. Its main objective was to assist young boys and girls who were uncertain about their real identity to find information through available documents and the blood samples stored at the National Bank of Genetic Data, without the intervention of the courts.

By interweaving their contentious actions based on an inalienable commitment to Life and to the right to an identity, and drawing on the main discursive trends of Western countries (both, the legislative/juridical field and the technological/scientific one), Abuelas embodies an innovative way of understanding politics; the narrative constituents of their story – the same ones derived from patriarchy – are imbued with an alternative meaning, transforming even religious and national icons within their contentious semantic field into
powerful tools to conduct their search. Their capacity to transform the traditionally structural weakness of patriarchal female beings into strength finds its expression in the construction of a political party-free screenplay, dedicated to fulfilling the very basis of their struggle: the defense of Life and the right to love. (Feijoó 1989: 78).

Maternal Political Action: From Emblem to Agency... to Aporia

A key feature of protest cycles is the diffusion of proclivity for collective actions, from beginners to unrelated groups and antagonists. The closer a cycle of social protest comes to peaking, the less capable related movements based on controversial agendas are in attaining significant public influence and/or support, because they are perceived as a menace to other social groups' idiosyncrasies and, therefore, they usually fail while trying to promote wider collective goals. The benefits from interweaving movements based on unquestionable core values, such as motherhood, can be measured in terms of their contribution to reduce the intensity the opposition to structural changes usually arouses. As mentioned, stressing the broader task of motherhood as a valid component among other alternatives brought into the public debate proves to be more effective in blocking the formation of counter-movements, which push the whole scenario into a zero-sum game. (Tarrow 1995: 156; Staggenborg 1997: 46, 123-5). Additionally, those movements play a crucial drafting role, given that the world of motherhood shares the same core values as that of patriarchy; as the insight that the primordial link between mother and child may play a legitimate political role, kinship is placed as a counterplot to the nation-state metanarrative attempt to build the citizen/nation ties analogically to those of the family, while undermining the competitive pattern of institutionalized politics. (Elshtain 1997: 137). Moreover, contentious movements built on maternal values acting within militarized societies are not seen as "truly subversive" by the elites and, therefore, they succeed to penetrate
and enlarge the margins of consensus, releasing vital open spaces for other
challengers\textsuperscript{30} to elaborate the protest that otherwise would remained sealed shut.

Thus, the variety of processes of diffusion, extension, imitation and reaction
– widespread in sectors that are normally quiescent to contentious actions – are
dressed, within the semantic field of political motherhood, in innovative patterns
which astonished even the participants themselves:

\begin{quote}
We were simply housewives. Most of us had never done anything outside
the home. I did not even know how to take a bus alone. I was not used to
going out without my husband. Even now I do not think I could do the
things I did then. (Vallino, in Arditti 1999: 54).
\end{quote}

Their non-hierarchic, non-partisan political approach moderates the "spiral of
radicalization" characteristic of competitive practices and succeeds in gathering
together vast and dissimilar people sharing a "single-issue veto alliance," despite
contingent personal nuances (Offe 1987: 383-4):

\begin{quote}
No mother is asked what her ideology is or what she does; neither do we
ask what her children have done. We do not defend ideologies; we defend
life… Our great concern is not to be manipulated by any political party…
Neither the government’s threats nor their rifles are a match for the faith of
a mother. (Jaquette 1989: 188).
\end{quote}

The work of cramming narratives from a status of social agent exposes the
discursive path of the Mothers' story and articulates its ethical impact with a wider
cycle of protest, making possible the inclusion of themes such as human and civil
rights, justice or peace in a feasible and catchy way, through alternative channels –
divergent from those originally populating (male) institutional politics. On this
matter, it is important to focus on the alliance between the Mothers and artists;
this somehow unusual convergence of interests between the two received a

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{30} Just to make justice with the other movements that shared (ideological or logistic) interactions with
the Mothers, I will briefly recall the most important: (1) related to Four Mothers - Peace Now; There is a Limit;
Parents against Silence; MK Yossi Beilin's movement calling for complete withdrawal from Lebanon and the
support of the kibbutz movement (logistic and participative); (2) Related to Abuelas - The Permanent
Assembly of Human Rights; Perez Esquivel's Peace and Justice Service; Madres de Plaza de Mayo (both
groups: Linea Fundadora and Bonafinni's dissident group); and the oldest, founded in 1937, LADH.}
mighty resonance among the population, providing both movements with an "extra social approval."

Two fine examples of this fruitful cooperation were the black and white placards designed by David Tartakover – one of the most famous graphic designers in Israel – posted at Tel Aviv metropolitan bus stations: "1,245 soldiers have already left Lebanon." The artist used the number of soldiers that had died in Lebanon, presenting the digits as on a counter screen which had – in a worrisome fashion – an empty window, waiting for the fifth digit to drop. (Zman Tel Aviv, 01.15.99: 12). The other representative example was the 2002 "TeatroXlalidentidad," event, designed by the daughter of "disappeared" parents, who was also searching for her brother, who was born in captivity. The script was based on the harsh difficulties following the acknowledgement of the truth, both from the youngster's and the biological family's viewpoint: the child's world is revealed as a fake, literally falling into pieces, and the true family, struggling between sorrow and faith, is trying to build a common future with the restored grandchild. (http://www.teatroxlaidentidad.net).

Within a cycle of protest, the interactions performed by the different actors are embedded into an inspiring process, making more productive the means of action and reshaping the personal identities due to the adaptation of the rules of contentious grammar and innovative ways of wording, unnoticed before but breathing, hidden, attached to the values detained beneath each task.

All through the process toward consciously political motherhood praxis, the founding pillars of patriarchal motherhood remained a protective shield against the perceived dangerous digression from agreed core values, as performed by the militaristic nation. Nevertheless, the process itself exceeded its own boundaries – the weeping woman turned into the insubordinate witness – inevitably challenging its own constituencies, "surpassing the limits of the concept of itself that it claims to have properly while presenting itself." (Derrida 1993: 32).

The antagonism disclosed throughout the weaving of both narratives – the patriarchal and the political motherhood – reflects the dialectic struggle between exclusion and dependence. (Howarth, Norval & Stavrakakis 2000: 22). Thus, the
exclusionary narrative of the former condemns the latter to be imprisoned by the impasse, the inescapable outcome of the oxymoron derived from the combination of "activism" and "motherhood," within the patriarchal framework.

The aporia arising from both stories represents itself as a "single duty" which multiplies and splits and contradicts itself ceaselessly, gliding and bending while testing the footprints' patterns imprinted along the narrative path – footprints that are, simultaneously, inconceivable but essential to the continuous mingling of the narrative space – and its very limits. (Derrida 1993: 16-18).

Insofar as the Mothers keep intact their fidelity to their societies' customary imagery of motherhood, the aporia shadows the long-term results of their struggle (meaning, the institutionalization of the demands into new policies), since the chosen script can not brook – given its margins – a workable alternative to its structural contradiction, its "M-Otherness," without renouncing the foundational constituents who, all along, endorsed their struggle with legitimacy.

Yet, women as mothers proved that they have enormous social power as long as their protest is continually climbing toward a zenith, opening up to the immediacy of affection, allowing powerless actors to be heard.
Diagram – Tracing the Narrative Path of "Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo" and Four Mothers"
Epilogue

For me, tracing the transformation of patriarchal motherhood foundations into a political ticket to the public arena for women still remains an amazing challenge – both intellectually and emotionally. Throughout the present analysis, I tried to hear the emergent voices and map out the different interactions that led to the establishment of an activist maternal identity, in order to disclose insights that might be able to enlighten, on the one hand, the new social self-consciousness achieved by participants through collective action and, on the other, the impact their presence had on the other political actors sharing the narrative field of contentious politics. I have found of special interest their unique contribution in terms of widening consensus margins and mitigating the spiral of radicalization characteristic of political confrontations, during a peak of social protest, while adding an ethical (and therefore, legitimate) basis to the claims aroused.

Paradoxically, the same militaristic agenda set to silence divergent political identities on behalf of "national unification for the sake of national security" caused a social sector usually excluded from political action to actively demand its right to raise private grievances publicly. By doing so, the Mothers acquired a strategic place as autonomous political actors, able to influence policy-makers by means that would be denied to other political agents due to their lack of legitimacy. By placing the maternal "preservative love" primordial duty as a public issue, they allowed the introduction of violence-free patterns of solidarity and altruism into the political game.

The activist maternal discourse displayed by Abuelas and Four Mothers neither reversed the patriarchy's binary schema of gender nor substantiated an alternative set of voices other than the relentless withholding of patriarchal motherhood's core values: those women remained faithful to the men in their lives, subordinating their own wills and hopes to the ultimate goal of protecting them and their progeny from any danger, no matter how hard this task might be. Even though this seemingly reflects a range-delimitation of the Mothers' political outcomes, it would be a regretful transgression to undermine their struggle as a
powerful deed able to transform the wording of politics, reshaping the vocabulary of contentious repertoire in a catchy and accessible fashion. As seen in Israel's case, the entrenchment of maternal work within republican civic parameters (meaning the assurance of the Jewish demographic advantage and the ceaseless supplies of new cadres of soldiers as a guarantee of the country's survival) and the receptiveness to customary discursive genres based on Jewish tradition won a renewed interpretation able to destabilize the exclusivity/superiority of the collective and national outlook of patriarchal motherhood identity, as developed through the Zionist metanarrative. Four Mothers succeeded to shape their commitment to peace as inherent to their prior responsibility toward their offspring's welfare, alongside (and not instead of) the fulfillment of their duties as "recruited" mothers, undoubtedly bound to the country's destiny and to the historical goals of the Jewish Nation.

The central motif shaping the Abuelas struggle enlightens the relevance of ethical issues, such as children's rights within the nation-state framework and, more specifically, the right to an identity (seen as a basic human right). The Abuelas, together with the Madres, actually spoiled the morbid spectacle mounted by the junta: they (physically and symbolically) rescued the absence/presence of their beloved "disappeared" from public oblivion by naming them persistently, inserting them (and themselves) back into the national history continuum, throughout the open space of the Plaza de Mayo.

The obstinacy of the Mothers in both cases confirmed their role as a restless, unbeatable rival. However they crossed the lines toward political activism, they did not pretend to challenge the dominant social order: as its "official gatekeepers," they assumed it was their duty to reverse a perceived deviation from the mutually agreed social script that otherwise would have been fatal to its own endurance. Thus, their story sometimes covered itself with the tragic veil of "an eternal return of the Same in the Different," while at other times it turned to embody the "emergence of new forces or conditions out of processes that appear at first glance either to be changeless in their essence or to be changing only in their phenomenal forms." (White 1973: 11).
Seeing the extent of the activist maternal political perspective, it is clear that the aporetic trap was inevitable, given the chosen narrative margins of the story; yet, the experience achieved by merging the antagonist significances of both plots (drawn from the patriarchy's and the activist's maternal librettos), while restoring the (womanly) capacity of wording contentious practices other than the competitive, male-oriented political praxis, may become a new challenge insofar as the released footprints of the aporetic relationship turn toward a self-valued and more feminist attitude. The integration of both feminine approaches may certainly be able to bypass the impasse (at least to some extent, enough to keep on track) while disclosing infinite voices, kept silent by the dominant male discourse or denied by the self-constraints of maternal activism or polarized feminism; thus, the aporia first faced by the Mothers would no longer appear as a dead end, because "it is not necessarily a failure or a simple paralysis, the sterile negativity of the impasse. It is neither stopping at it nor overcoming it." (Derrida 1993: 32).

This fusion is intended to provide the strength to recreate power, authority, and temper. Nevertheless, it is imperative to feminism to overcome inner voices rejecting their maternal essence, denying the gratefulness and joy of been able to conceive Life. This alternative and promising scenario can be realized only if feminism can both practice and theorize a maternal discourse, rephrasing patriarchal "M-Otherness" while keeping mothers' skills and values, which proved to be competent enough to mingle power and powerlessness, authority and invisibility, resistance and mercifulness, wrath and love.
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