

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Stories of Success: Strategic Connections Between the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the Marea Verde in Argentina

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The Madres de Plaza de Mayo are an internationally renowned and respected human rights group that fought for justice for the *desaparecidos* during the time of the last military dictatorship in Argentina, the *junta militar*. Their political strategies proved successful in directing domestic and international attention to the human rights abuses carried out by the *junta*, and their activism contributed to the democratic government's prioritization of human rights legislature today. The Marea Verde movement for legalized abortion began in 2005 and became more formal and public after 2017. This thesis analyzes the relationship between the activism of the Madres and the Marea Verde to draw conclusions about the effect of the political strategies used. How has the enduring legacy of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo affected the success of the contemporary pro-choice movement (the Marea Verde) in Argentina? This thesis argues that the Madres popularized public and political strategies that were adopted and personalized by the Marea Verde. The Marea Verde had different goals and motivations, but their successes and actions were rooted in those of the Madres. Following the example of the Madres, the Marea Verde created collective identities and frames of meaning that defined their movement as ethical and justified, thus appealing to the public and leading to cultural successes such as the social decriminalization of abortion. Again using strategies made popular by the Madres, the Marea Verde hosted demonstrations in public plazas and reached out to international actors, thus pressuring the government to effect legal change. By adopting the core strategies used by the Madres, the Marea Verde were able to create a space for pro-choice ideas in the political and ethical consciousness of Argentina that resulted in increased support for the practice in the society and legislature.

Stories of Success:  
Strategic Connections Between the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the Marea Verde in Argentina

By

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## **Dedication**

*For my parents, my brother, and my friends*

*A la mujer argentina, que algún día nademos todas en la marea verde*

## Acknowledgements

I would not have been able to complete this thesis without the extensive and dedicated support I received throughout this process. To my advisor Dr. Michela Russo, thank you for meeting weekly with me throughout the year, especially this semester, to give me advice on my arguments and review my writing. I know that your guidance helped me to improve my analysis and grow as a writer. To Dr. Anthony Marcum, thank you for pushing me to always extend my analysis and say more about my ideas. Your ability to guide each of us through researching and writing a thesis during the pandemic has been extraordinary and your support is invaluable.

To my peers in the Honors cohort, I wish we could have had the chance to complete our theses in person. Despite the virtual setting, I am so thankful that I had the opportunity to meet each of you. Your advice and comments have allowed me to better my thesis and your support has inspired me to continue researching, analyzing, and writing despite the struggles of doing so. Thank you to all my friends as well, for allowing me to think through my arguments out loud and ask endlessly for input on miniscule, relatively unimportant details (like what font size to use). Thank you also for pulling me away from my work when I was overdue for a break and pushing me into writing more when I was not motivated. I could not imagine the last four years here without all of the memories we have made.

I could not be more grateful for my parents. You have given me everything I could have asked for and I appreciate your support more than anything. Thank you both for always helping me find the right words and for always being available to help. Thank you to my brother Cameron as well. Even though we have vastly different ideas on how to correctly use punctuation, I know I can always count on you to give feedback and notice small details that would have otherwise escaped my attention. I love you and I am so proud to be related to you.

The women of the Marea Verde have shown me what it means to stand up for personal beliefs, even if this means defying the status quo and persevering despite setbacks and failures. I have followed the evolution of the movement since 2019 and waited with anticipation alongside Argentina and the Marea Verde to hear the results of the Congress vote in 2020. When abortion was legalized, I shared their feelings of achievement. I am forever inspired by the perseverance and defiance of these women and I will continue to use their activism as an example of how to fight for what I believe is right.

Finally, thank you to the University of Michigan and Ann Arbor. I have learned and grown so much throughout my four years here and I will always consider Michigan to be a “hoMe.”

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## **Discussion on Translations**

As this thesis focuses on movements and activism native to Argentina, I use evidence from Spanish sources. I translated these sources primarily using my language skills from twelve years of academic instruction. In order to avoid confusion, I consulted with my advisor Dr. Russo to draw on her experience as a Spanish lecturer at the University of Michigan. I also consulted Linguee, an online database that learns from online bilingual texts to offer accurate translations.



## Chapter One: Introduction

### I. Introduction

The research question of this thesis was inspired by interests in women's health, reproductive and human rights, and Latin American studies. These interests intersect in an analysis of the contemporary pro-choice movement in Argentina, which champions legalizing abortion as a way to protect the lives of women and promote the freedom of individual choice. This movement, hereafter referred to as the Argentine *Marea Verde* [green tide], is a powerful campaign that has caused a cultural and generational change. In addition to this contemporary activism, Argentina has a history of influential sociopolitical organizations, the most noteworthy being the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* [Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo], a widely respected and revolutionary movement that formed during the past military dictatorship of the 1970s.

This thesis draws connections between the political strategies used by the two movements (the *Marea Verde* and the *Madres*) to demonstrate how the *Marea Verde* were able to create and exploit the parallels in their activism to influence and ultimately strengthen the contemporary pro-choice argument. I seek to explain the successes of the *Marea Verde* by demonstrating that this modern movement looked to the *Madres* as a crucial model and resource for inspiration, emulating certain aspects of their activism. The *Madres* created a space in both the social and political spheres and popularized strategies that the *Marea Verde* utilized to advance their cause and achieve success in the fight for the decriminalization and legalization of abortion.

The idea of success for the Marea Verde movement in this thesis is multifaceted as both social and political changes factor into my analysis of the movement's progress. Because of the Marea Verde, there has been a cultural shift – both in attitudes and more tangibly, in the law itself. Abortion, once a taboo topic in Argentine society, has become widely debated as the movement has progressed, with more activists participating and publicizing their beliefs. Most significantly, the recent passage of a bill legalizing abortion can be directly attributed to the pressure and influence of this cultural movement. The strategies used by the Marea Verde, made more meaningful due to their association with the Madres, promoted this cultural shift on the issue of abortion and reinforced the pro-choice efforts in the Argentine political world.

I must also qualify my discussion of the pro-choice Marea Verde movement. Pro-choice ideas had been present in Argentina before the formation of this movement; however, their voices weren't heard until the Marea Verde insurgence. Feminists have discussed the topic of abortion and its legalization for years, most notably during annual *Encuentros* [meetings] where women gathered to discuss a variety of social issues.<sup>1</sup> This thesis draws a distinction between historical views and the current movement, however, as there is a marked difference in activism between the two. Despite the presence of pro-choice sentiments in the past, only the Marea Verde movement has been able to foster outspoken engagement and achieve appreciable cultural and political change for abortion in Argentina.

The Marea Verde is unmistakably a feminist movement. The majority of the participants are women, and the female voices are amplified in their involvement. For these

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Sutton and Elizabeth Borland, "Framing Abortion Rights in Argentina's Encuentros Nacionales de Mujeres," *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 1 (2013): 194–234.

reasons, this thesis focuses its attention and analysis on the female activists of the Marea Verde. My argument draws specific connections between the Madres and the Marea Verde that hinge upon the female identities of the activists (i.e., both as mothers and women).

## **II. Literature Review**

This section explores the existing literature pertaining to the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Marea Verde while identifying analytical gaps filled by this thesis. The Madres have been the subject of much research and analysis. Scholars have focused on aspects such as the enduring legacy of this movement as well as its effects on the dictatorship and Argentine society in general. In contrast, the literature surrounding the Argentine Marea Verde is relatively limited, considering that the effort has only recently been able to more strongly organize in favor of legal reform. There is some analysis concerning how pro-choice ideas fit in among the larger feminist ideals of Argentina as well as analysis on manifestations of pro-choice activism (such as misoprostol activism, discussed later), but due to the limited nature of studies on this topic, there is a lack of analysis connecting the Marea Verde to their predecessors. This thesis argues that the legacy and symbolism of the Madres has been influential for the achievements and advocacy of the Marea Verde, thus contributing new analysis to the literature.

### *Social Movement Theory*

The literature pertaining to the wider category of social movement strategy offers valuable insight that can be applied to an analysis of the Madres and Marea Verde movements. For example, Holston and Nguyen both define different types of citizenship that describe the manner of organization and politicization of activist groups in West Africa and

Brazil.<sup>2</sup> Insurgent and therapeutic citizenship name the different ways activists form a collective identity and the interactions that characterize their relationship with the government. In other research, Ferree and Ewig investigate how the organizational form of feminist mobilization varies as political opportunities change.<sup>3</sup> Their research analyzes how feminist activists take advantage of available political channels to advance their cause. Finally, Snow et al. explores how cultural and framing approaches in strategic social movements attract and incentivize participation.<sup>4</sup> This thesis applies these concepts to the Marea Verde and explores how the movement uses framing in a manner inspired by the Madres in order to advance their cause to the Argentine public and policymakers.

More research on social movements concentrates solely on health-related issues. Brown et al. focuses on participation, theorizing that activist groups organize as a result of a “politicized collective illness identity” – a medical condition that brings members together in shared experience.<sup>5</sup> Other scholars analyze the expertise and knowledge of said participants in reference to the collective illness or health issue. McCormick et al. defines boundary movements and their characteristics, applying this concept to research regarding the environmental breast cancer movement. They argue that the constituent organizations in boundary movements move between the social world and the relevant realm of knowledge,

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<sup>2</sup> James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*, 2009, <http://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691142906/insurgent-citizenship>; Vinh-Kim Nguyen, “The Republic of Therapy: Triage and Sovereignty in West Africa’s Time of AIDS,” October 11, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822393504>.

<sup>3</sup> Myra Marx Ferree and Christina Ewig, “Chapter 10. Global Feminist Organising: Identifying Patterns of Activism,” in *The Women’s Movement in Protest, Institutions, and the Internet: Australia in Transnational Perspective*, by Sarah Maddison and Marian Sawer, 2013, 148–62, <https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~mferree/documents/maddison%20&%20Sawer%20ch10.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> David A. Snow et al., “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation,” *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 4 (1986): 464–81, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095581>.

<sup>5</sup> Phil Brown et al., “Embodied Health Movements: New Approaches to Social Movements in Health,” *Sociology of Health & Illness* 26, no. 1 (2004): 50–80, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9566.2004.00378.x>.

e.g., between the private experience of breast cancer and scientific knowledge concerning environmentally related illnesses, to construct a multifaceted political strategy.<sup>6</sup> This research is important for this analysis as it assists in explaining the strategies of the Madres and the Marea Verde, who each connect the private sphere of individual experience with the public sphere of state participation.

### *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*

Scholars concerned with the political strategies of the Madres, such as Bouvard and Cuchivague, have argued that their movement has made use of the socialization of motherhood and maternity.<sup>7</sup> This literature investigates how the Madres politicized and employed their identities as mothers. Other scholars have focused more on the connections made by the Madres with supporters not specifically involved with the movement. Keck and Sikkink, for instance, posit that the Madres formed important transnational activist networks by using what they call a “boomerang pattern” to solicit additional support for petitioning the government.<sup>8</sup> Scholars like Curvale, focusing on the organizational structure and participation, have investigated the mutual commitments of participation to explore how the Madres attracted members and supporters.<sup>9</sup> The literature of these scholars is focused on components within and specific to the movement associated with the Madres. Although their

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<sup>6</sup> Sabrina McCormick, Phil Brown, and Stephen Zavestoski, “The Personal Is Scientific, the Scientific Is Political: The Public Paradigm of the Environmental Breast Cancer Movement,” *Sociological Forum* 18, no. 4 (2003): 545–76.

<sup>7</sup> Marguerite Guzman Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002); Karen Ortiz Cuchivague, “Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo y su legado por la defensa de los derechos humanos,” *Trabajo Social*, no. 14 (2012): 165–77.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, UNITED STATES: Cornell University Press, 1998), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/umichigan/detail.action?docID=3138636>.

<sup>9</sup> Carolina Curvale, “Rationality, Trust, and Collective Action: Argentina’s Mothers of Plaza de Mayo.,” *Compendium: Cuadernos de Economía y Administración* 4, no. 8 (August 30, 2017): 47–65.

respective analyses hold further implications for other social movements, these authors do not connect their research to the success and strategy of the contemporary abortion legalization advocates.

### *Marea Verde*

The literature of the Marea Verde has not made this type of historical connection to the Madres either, mainly focusing on how these activists are able to establish themselves within the modern political and cultural society. Many scholars analyze the ways in which the strategies of this campaign have responded to influence, such as the accessibility of resources. McReynolds-Pérez takes this approach by focusing on the ways in which activist and abortion policies have been shaped by the availability of misoprostol.<sup>10</sup> This thesis, though also investigating the roles of constructive influences on activist policies, is specifically identifying the Madres as the formative force.

In another analysis, Anderson explores the effects of different strategies by arguing that interaction patterns with state actors have led to a spectrum of outcomes, citing abortion efforts in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina.<sup>11</sup> In an additional work, Anderson and Ruibal focus in on Argentina's abortion effort by considering how three types of strategies address the state, the legal framework, and the need for reform.<sup>12</sup> My argument addresses the effects of

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<sup>10</sup> Julia McReynolds-Pérez, "Misoprostol for the Masses: The Activist-Led Proliferation of Pharmaceutical Abortion in Argentina" (Ph.D., United States -- Wisconsin, The University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2014), <http://www.proquest.com/docview/1835182231/abstract/A6B948D934964E24PQ/1>.

<sup>11</sup> Cora Fernández Anderson, *Fighting for Abortion Rights in Latin America : Social Movements, State Allies and Institutions* (Routledge, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429340499>.

<sup>12</sup> Alba Ruibal and Cora Fernandez Anderson, "Legal Obstacles and Social Change: Strategies of the Abortion Rights Movement in Argentina," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 8, no. 4 (August 7, 2020): 698–713, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2018.1541418>.

the Marea Verde's political strategies (in considering their success) but expounds upon a historical aspect by citing the influence of the Madres as an explanation.

### **III. Methodology**

I argue that there is a continuity between the Madres and the Marea Verde. The two movements share political strategies and a space for activism – it is clear from the characteristics of the movement that the Marea Verde looked to the Madres and drew upon their legacy. I argue as well that these commonalities bolstered the pro-choice argument and furthered the influence of the movement. My argument is based off of an analysis of the shared strategies and their effect on the Argentine people and politics.

I emphasize two different time frames in my analysis. The first, dealing with the Madres, begins in 1977 with the formation of their movement. My main focus is on the activities of the Madres during the time of the *junta militar* [the military dictatorship]. I also discuss the reputation of the Madres as it was during the formation of the Marea Verde so as to better illustrate their legacy and influence. The second time frame begins in 2003 with the formation of the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe and Free Abortion, but primarily focuses on the construction of the Marea Verde beginning in 2017. I end my discussion of the Marea Verde in 2020, with the legalization of abortion in Argentina.

This legalization occurred during the writing of this thesis. With the passage of this bill, the Marea Verde were able to fulfill one of their primary goals. As such, my thesis needed to change in order to accommodate this new and significant success for a more comprehensive analysis.

This thesis uses a combination of different source types to construct a cohesive analysis. I use first-hand evidence of the strategies of the two movements. For the Marea Verde, as a newer and current movement, this information is mainly drawn from pictures and newspaper articles in both Spanish and English detailing their activity and organization. For the Madres, I use books and historical accounts that describe their activism during the time of the *junta*. I identified five aspects of political activism used by the Marea Vere that are linked to the Madres as strategies: identities, framing, movement structure, public gathering, and international attention. I analyze these aspects of the two movements using the literature of social movement theory. Though these sources evaluate movements not connected to the Madres or Marea Verde, the theories they introduce are applicable and beneficial for analysis.

I additionally make use of existing research that has investigated one of the two movements. This literature often presents an analysis of the strategies used for activism, tying in relevant concepts from social movement theory. I then extrapolate and extend this perspective to include an analysis of the other movement. I find that the link between the Madres and the Marea Verde allows for similar inferences and conclusions about the effectiveness of the strategies used.

#### **IV. Chapter Summary**

This section provides a brief summary of each of the remaining chapters of the thesis. To ensure full understanding of the context and relevance of the Madres and Marea Verde, Chapter Two presents the history of the two movements. The thesis then proceeds with an analysis of the two movements and a discussion of the success gained by the pertinent strategies.



Chapter Three focuses on how the two movements presented their cause to the Argentine public. This section discusses the frames and identities claimed by both groups of activists and examines how the appeal to society garnered participation and support. The chapter then goes on to present evidence for the influence and efficacy of these strategies: the success of the Marea Verde from a cultural and social perspective.

Chapter Four looks at how the Madres and Marea Verde organized politically to petition Argentina's legal institutions. I explore the theory of boundary movements (introduced by McCormick et. al.) with respect to the structure and organization of the movements, as well as the significance of the Madres and Marea Verde's shared symbol: the *pañuelo*. This chapter goes on to investigate the purpose and consequences of the two movements' strategy of public gatherings and the attention that these strategies attracted. The final section of the chapter provides a discussion of the legislative changes leading to the successful legalization of abortion that can be directly tied to the efforts of the Marea Verde.

Chapter Five summarizes the analysis of the political strategies for both movements, then connects them again to the broader consideration of success. The chapter also discusses the further implications of this research for Argentina, the wider Latin America, and the world. I question how the recent legalization of abortion may have consequences for changing cultural opinions both in Argentina and neighboring Latin American countries. I also consider the effect that the link between the Madres and Marea Verde may have for future social movements, given that it demonstrates the advantage of exploiting the existing sociopolitical context of a country. Finally, I explore the implications of the Marea Verde's activism during the pandemic for future social movements and their use of technology. I

identify these topics as areas of future research, acknowledging that they are beyond the scope of the current research question.

## Chapter Two: Historical Context

### I. Introduction

This thesis explores the evolution of the Marea Verde due to the influence of the Madres – specifically focusing on how the legacy and reputation of the Madres has affected the development and success of the push for pro-choice legislation. The Madres are a human rights group unique to Argentina that arose due to complicated political and social pressures. A full understanding of their motives and importance requires first an understanding of the wider context of Argentina. The same is true of the abortion issue. Although the legalization of abortion is debated globally, the movements in individual countries cannot be evaluated using the same political and social constructs. Therefore, we cannot use another country’s lens to understand an Argentine experience, as the movement is rooted in a different context and has a different meaning for participants.

Argentine feminists center the abortion debate in human rights.<sup>13</sup> Their continued use of a “human rights” framework (i.e., defining abortion as a human right) is in contrast to a successful approach taken by feminists in the United States (who use the language of “reproductive justice” to structure their debate). This choice is intentional despite the “structural and strategic connections between reproductive governance, equity, and justice” that the term “rights” is unable to offer.<sup>14</sup> Instead of adopting an abortion paradigm passed on from another country, the Marea Verde formulated ideas and strategies based on effective

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<sup>13</sup> Andrea F Noguera, “ARGENTINA’S PATH TO LEGALIZING ABORTION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF IRELAND, THE UNITED STATES AND ARGENTINA,” *Southwestern Journal of International Law* 25 (n.d.): 37.

<sup>14</sup> Lynn M. Morgan, “Reproductive Rights or Reproductive Justice? Lessons from Argentina,” *Health and Human Rights Journal* (blog), April 16, 2015, <https://www.hhrjournal.org/2015/04/reproductive-rights-or-reproductive-justice-lessons-from-argentina/>.

historical methods specific to their political climate and culture. The histories described in the remainder of the chapter offer context and background that will facilitate greater understanding of the compelling links between the two movements.

## II. Madres de Plaza de Mayo

*“Our lives were divided into before and after”*

- Madres de Plaza de Mayo<sup>15</sup>

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo came together, in the beginning, as a group of worried and grieving women who searched for their sons and daughters who went missing as a result of the Dirty War. Through their actions and persistence, the group evolved to fill a vacuum in Argentina; the formation of the Madres helped to satisfy the societal need for truth and political activism during a time of fear and enforced silence.

The “Dirty War” is one of many terms used to describe the campaign undertaken by the Argentine dictatorship against suspected dissidents or participants in subversive activity from 1976 to 1983.<sup>16</sup> President Isabel Perón, widow of the previous president, was deposed in a 1976 coup that culminated in a three-man *junta militar* [military group], led by General Jorge Videla, coming to power.<sup>17</sup> These military commanders took advantage of Isabel’s unstable presidency, weakened by the massive civil unrest stemming from the political divides between extreme right and left-wing groups, to establish complete political and

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<sup>15</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 65.

<sup>16</sup> “Dirty War | Definition, History, & Facts,” Encyclopedia Britannica, May 11, 2020, <http://www.britannica.com/event/Dirty-War>.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Hoeffel, “Junta Takes over in Argentina: Archive, 25 March 1976,” *The Guardian*, March 25, 2016, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/25/argentina-junta-coup-videla-peron-1976-archive>.

military control.<sup>18</sup> The new dictatorship, the self-titled “Process of National Reorganization,” began to immediately restrict the rights of its citizens, limiting the freedom of expression, freedom of press, and freedom of assembly.<sup>19</sup>

The military saw itself as the “natural ruling caste” of Argentina, a position that allowed it to fulfill its role as the “guardian of the nation’s values,” which were purportedly threatened by leftist politics.<sup>20</sup> To preserve their ideology and administration, the *junta* seized those suspected of “being aligned with leftist, socialist, or social justice causes”.<sup>21</sup> Though the seizures were justified by the *junta* as being necessary to eliminate the “pure evil”<sup>22</sup> of subversion, the so-called political and leftist terrorists were often, in reality, innocent citizens whose only crime was that they “expressed a social conscience.”<sup>23</sup> Many of these individuals were never seen again and thus became part of the *desaparecidos* [the disappeared], a name given to those thousands of people murdered unjustly and secretly.

The political prisoners of this time, the *desaparecidos*, were also called such due to the circumstances of their capture. The *junta* did not want to compromise their image abroad; thus, citizens were abducted quickly and without due process, to be kept in secret military detention centers, tortured, and murdered “while the country continued [...] as if nothing had happened.”<sup>24</sup> Plainclothes officers and unmarked cars carried out the abductions, their

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<sup>18</sup> Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty War”* (Duke University Press, 1997), p54.

<sup>19</sup> “Dirty War | Definition, History, & Facts.”

<sup>20</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 23.

<sup>21</sup> Erin Blakemore, “30,000 People Were ‘Disappeared’ in Argentina’s Dirty War. These Women Never Stopped Looking,” HISTORY, accessed July 18, 2020, <https://www.history.com/news/mothers-plaza-de-mayo-disappeared-children-dirty-war-argentina>.

<sup>22</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Bouvard, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Bouvard, 24

anonymity appearing to assist the covert nature of the Dirty War.<sup>25</sup> However, the “systematic discrepancy between the force required and the force deployed [for these operations] suggested a need for disclosure beneath the *junta*’s public denials.”<sup>26</sup> The abductions were “staged displays,” often carried out in a manner that ensured recognition of the act.<sup>27</sup> The *junta* also allowed for “strategic revelations,” releasing prisoners seemingly by chance.<sup>28</sup> Thus, though Argentine society appeared normal on the surface, there were windows into the clandestine fate of many citizens. The mixed message sent to the public through this dual reality was intended both to remind citizens of the *junta*’s power and to spread fear, a strategic way to “[keep] the population quiescent.”<sup>29</sup>

As more citizens began to disappear and rumors of mass graves and “death flights” spread, families found that official routes and paperwork did nothing to find their loved ones. The government did not officially document or identify those they took – officials sought to erase their existence by disposing of their bodies in unmarked graves or in the ocean. However, the mothers who persisted in searching for their missing children found each other and began to create a community in the late 1970s. Despite the violent government censorship, these women formed a network that sought out and appealed to mothers in the same situation. The women shared information and resources to further their search, eventually concluding that an audience with the government was necessary to find out more.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Bouvard, 27

<sup>26</sup> Bouvard, 28

<sup>27</sup> Bouvard, 28

<sup>28</sup> Bouvard, 42

<sup>29</sup> Bouvard, 4

<sup>30</sup> Bouvard, 69

On April 30, 1977, fourteen women gathered in the Plaza de Mayo across from the Casa Rosada, the seat of the Argentine government and site of the President's office. The plaza was deserted on that day, a Saturday, so the group eventually decided to meet again on Thursday, on the advice of member Azucena Villaflor, to make their demands for information about their children more visible through the attention of a crowded public area. By gathering in the Plaza, the Madres had decided to "work openly against a regime that enforced secrecy and total compliance."<sup>31</sup>

The *junta* attempted to persuade the women that their children were not detained, but were in fact political terrorists and subversives who had fled the country, and sent policemen to harass the mothers while they gathered.<sup>32</sup> However, the women marched around the Plaza to show their unity in defiance of the government's attempts to remove them. As their meetings persisted and their numbers grew, the Madres adopted a symbol so that they, and their cause, could be easily identified: a white handkerchief often used as a child's diaper (the *pañuelo*), worn around their head.

The dictatorship, afraid of the effect these women had on each other and the public, attempted to discredit their movement by referring to them as *las locas* [the madwomen] but the morality of the women's cause was easy for the public to identify with and so the movement continued to grow.<sup>33</sup> With a stronger following came more repression and violence from the *junta*; the women were often threatened or arrested. Many of the original members, including founder Azucena Villaflor were taken and murdered.<sup>34</sup> The Madres,

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<sup>31</sup> Bouvard, 69

<sup>32</sup> Bouvard, 70

<sup>33</sup> Blakemore, "30,000 People Were 'Disappeared' in Argentina's Dirty War. These Women Never Stopped Looking."

<sup>34</sup> Blakemore.

lacking substantial press coverage and meaningful support (especially internationally) due to the *junta*'s efforts of repression, protested throughout the 1978 FIFA World Cup, held in Argentina, and gained international attention from the coverage of their demonstrations shot by reporters in town for the event.

The dictatorship began to crumble in 1981: General Videla was succeeded by General Roberto Viola, who struggled with economic instability, civic opposition, and increasing international pressure.<sup>35</sup> Power continued to change hands as officials worked to stabilize the country, and in some cases, cover up evidence of activities carried out during the Dirty War. Throughout it all, the Madres continued to pressure the government, meeting on the Plaza and asking for information and justice for their children. Democracy returned to Argentina in 1983 with the election of Raúl Alfonsín, and the Madres used the newly available democratic pathways to call on the government to fulfill their demands.<sup>36</sup>

The following years saw trials and investigations of accusations concerning the Dirty War activities, carried out by institutions such as the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP). This organization published a report in 1984 on the kidnappings, torture, and killings carried out by the *junta* entitled *Nunca Más: Informe de la Comisión Nacional Sobre la Desaparición de Personas* [Never Again: The Report of the Argentina National Commission on the Disappeared]. The phrase *Nunca Más* became a rallying cry for Argentina that “combined political and moral principles, distinguished the present from the past, and proposed a common future”: a future where the Argentine

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<sup>35</sup> “Dirty War | Definition, History, & Facts.”

<sup>36</sup> “Dirty War | Definition, History, & Facts.”



government would never again act against its constituents.<sup>37</sup> The slogan served as an “unassailable emblem of morality” – both a reminder and a promise.<sup>38</sup>

During this time the Madres began to disagree on how best to continue and organize their fight for truth and justice. They split into two factions. The more radical and hierarchical *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* [Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Association], led by Hebe de Bonafini, was committed to carrying on their children’s political work and pushed for a socialist transformation of Argentina. Women disillusioned with this approach split to form *Madres de Plaza de Mayo – Línea Fundadora* [the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Founding Line], a group that focused on legislation, recovery of remains, and justice, with a more cooperative attitude toward the government.<sup>39</sup>

Despite their differences, these two groups continue to march on the Plaza every Thursday with their *pañuelos*. The white cloths have become so emblematic of their movement that the stones of the Plaza have been painted with repeating images of them. The Madres have also become an important symbol for and an example of political activism, human rights, courage, and maternal love in Argentina and around the world.

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<sup>37</sup> Morgan, “Reproductive Rights or Reproductive Justice?”

<sup>38</sup> Morgan.

<sup>39</sup> Marc Becker, “Madres de La Plaza de Mayo,” in *The Oxford International Encyclopedia of Peace* (Oxford University Press, 2010), <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195334685.001.0001/acref-9780195334685-e-416>.

### III. Marea Verde

*“Hay un antes y un después [there is a before and after]”*

- Mariana Romero of the Marea Verde<sup>40</sup>

The Marea Verde in Argentina exist as a subset of the overall societal shift toward feminism. Activists who participate in advocating for legalizing and decriminalizing abortion often support other feminist causes as well (such as *Ni Una Menos*, meaning “not one [woman] less”, a cause that is dedicated toward eradicating gender-based violence).

The Marea Verde arose out of a need for a viable solution to a previously overlooked problem: a lack of effective family planning services. Despite being legal and technically available, many women struggled to gain reliable access to contraceptives due to factors such as economic constraints, relationship violence, or misinformation.<sup>41</sup> Without proper preventatives, unwanted pregnancies are likely to occur; however, Argentine law only allowed for abortion if the mother’s life or health was in danger or if the pregnancy occurred as a result of rape.<sup>42</sup> Without any safe options, many women resorted to trying their own methods – it is estimated that as many as half a million clandestine abortions occurred in

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<sup>40</sup> “Por qué seguimos marchando hacia el aborto legal en Argentina,” Amnesty International, accessed April 16, 2021, <http://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/campaigns/2019/08/the-green-wave/>.

<sup>41</sup> “Argentina: Limits on Birth Control Threaten Human Rights,” Human Rights Watch, June 15, 2005, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2005/06/15/argentina-limits-birth-control-threaten-human-rights>.

<sup>42</sup> Graciela Rodriguez-Ferrand, “Argentina: Supreme Court Decision on Abortion | Global Legal Monitor,” web page, March 16, 2012, [//www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/argentina-supreme-court-decision-on-abortion/](http://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/argentina-supreme-court-decision-on-abortion/).

Argentina every year.<sup>43</sup> These procedures were often unsafe and unsanitary; illegal abortions had been “the leading cause of maternal mortality for two decades.”<sup>44</sup>

Argentine women have been meeting since 1985 to discuss issues and participate in various movements at the annual *Encuentros Nacionales de Mujeres* [National Women’s Gatherings].<sup>45</sup> It was at the 1988 meeting for this conference that the first Argentine organization for abortion rights was formed: The Commission for the Right to Abortion.<sup>46</sup> More women began talking about this issue in the 1990s, but then-president Carlos Menem opposed legalizing abortion, even creating an annual “Day of the Unborn Child” to push back against emerging pro-choice ideas.

Néstor Kirchner served as president from 2003-2007, and was succeeded by his wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (president from 2007-2015). The two have been described as “champions of human rights and gender justice;” however, both presidents opposed abortion and did not support legalization.<sup>47</sup> Despite governmental opposition and inaction, the pro-choice movement during this period saw immense growth and support. One of the most important developments was the creation of the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion. Formed at the 2003 *Encuentro* and launched in 2005, the campaign’s slogan is “sex education to decide, contraceptives not to abort, legal abortion not to die.”<sup>48</sup> The Campaign acts as an umbrella, tying together multiple other organizations with the same goals, such as the Argentine chapter of Catholics for Choice. The Campaign

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<sup>43</sup> Rodriguez-Ferrand.

<sup>44</sup> Rodriguez-Ferrand.

<sup>45</sup> Shena Cavallo, “Strength in Numbers: Argentina’s Women’s Movement,” International Women’s Health Coalition, November 22, 2017, <https://iwhc.org/2017/11/strength-numbers-argentinas-womens-movement/>.

<sup>46</sup> Sutton and Borland, “Framing Abortion Rights in Argentina’s Encuentros Nacionales de Mujeres.”

<sup>47</sup> Morgan, “Reproductive Rights or Reproductive Justice?”

<sup>48</sup> “Quiénes somos – Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal Seguro y Gratuito,” accessed April 16, 2021, <http://www.abortolegal.com.ar/about/>.

authored the IVE bill (with the goal of revising the penal code, decriminalizing abortion, and allowing for the voluntary interruption of pregnancy) in 2006 and presented it to Congress in 2007.<sup>49</sup> The bill was not accepted as the governments of Kirchner and Fernández were opposed to abortion, but the Campaign dedicated itself to present the bill every two years since, in hope of it being included on the legislative agenda.<sup>50</sup> The National Campaign also adopted the *pañuelo verde* (a green handkerchief) as its official symbol, marking what would become the identifying emblem of the Marea Verde.

Pro-choice advocates gained a small victory in 2012 with a Supreme Court ruling (Caso F.A.L).<sup>51</sup> Prior to this case, the Argentine penal code only allowed abortion if the mother's life or health was threatened or in situations where the pregnancy resulted from the rape of a mentally disabled woman. This landmark ruling clarified that abortion in all cases of rape was not punishable by law.

Moving forward off of this momentum, many new developments occurred in 2018 as the contemporary movement relevant to this thesis became more formalized and publicized. A mass mobilization of supporters (*pañuelazo*) gathered in front of the National Congress with their green scarves to show support for legal, safe, and free abortions in February 2018.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, the Campaign was partially successful on their seventh proposal of the IVE bill. The legislators accepted the bill, which would allow for abortion in the first 14

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<sup>49</sup> Morgan, "Reproductive Rights or Reproductive Justice?"

<sup>50</sup> Cele Fierro and Pablo Vasco, "The Struggle for Abortion Rights in Argentina | International Socialist Review," *International Socialist Review*, no. 112, accessed April 16, 2021, <https://isreview.org/issue/112/struggle-abortion-rights-argentina>.

<sup>51</sup> Morgan, "Reproductive Rights or Reproductive Justice?"

<sup>52</sup> Women's March Global, "The History of Abortion Rights Struggle in Argentina and Status of Abortion Rights in Latin America," Medium, August 6, 2018, <https://medium.com/womens-march-global/the-history-and-status-of-abortion-rights-in-argentina-1e207e44d921>.

weeks of pregnancy, and began to debate on it in April 2018.<sup>53</sup> Then-president Mauricio Macri, though opposed to abortion, called for Congress to place the bill on the agenda in order to give the issue to the legislators – he invited them to “vote their conscience.”<sup>54</sup>

To show support, activists organized a 24 hour march the day before the final decision on the bill in June 2018.<sup>55</sup> The lower house of Congress (the Chamber of Deputies) narrowly passed the bill, a huge victory for the pro-choice advocates. Unfortunately, the Senate rejected the bill in August later that same year. However, current President Alberto Fernández (who was elected after Macri in 2019) supports the legalization of abortion. He announced at the opening of a new legislative session on March 1, 2020 that he would be introducing a new bill in order to address the issue.<sup>56</sup> The presentation of the bill was delayed until later in the year due to the nationwide lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>57</sup> The final vote took place in December of 2020, with both the House and the Senate approving a bill that legalized abortion up to the 14<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy.<sup>58</sup> With this historic decision, Argentina became one of the few Latin American countries that allow for legal abortion.

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<sup>53</sup> Daniel Politi, “Legal Abortion in Argentina? A Long Shot Is Suddenly Within Reach - The New York Times,” The New York Times, April 14, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/14/world/americas/argentina-abortion-pope-francis.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Politi.

<sup>55</sup> Global, “The History of Abortion Rights Struggle in Argentina and Status of Abortion Rights in Latin America.”

<sup>56</sup> Mariela Daby and Mason Moseley, “Argentina Is about to Debate Legalizing Abortion — despite Being a Very Catholic Country,” *Washington Post*, accessed April 16, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/03/06/argentina-is-about-debate-legalizing-abortion-despite-being-very-catholic-country/>.

<sup>57</sup> Ciara Nugent, “These Activists Are Helping Women in Argentina Get Abortions During Lockdown,” *Time*, May 1, 2020, <https://time.com/5830687/argentina-abortion-coronavirus/>.

<sup>58</sup> Katy Watson, “Argentina Abortion: Senate Approves Legalisation in Historic Decision - BBC News,” *BBC News*, December 30, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-55475036>.

The pro-choice advocates used the parameters of human rights to frame their discourse for a few different reasons. Human rights became a significant political construct in the time of the *junta* when the public began to demand their rights to their lives and freedoms. Argentina, in the wake of the dictatorship, prioritized the protection of human rights and the importance of their inclusion in legislature - the country has been “admired for its human rights policy [...] and progressive laws since the 1980s.”<sup>59</sup> The pro-choice supporters hoped that, by categorizing abortion and reproductive rights under the larger umbrella of human rights, the government would be more likely to favorably consider the idea. Additionally, as the Kirchner and Fernández administrations in the 2000s and early 2010s heavily advanced human rights legislation in Argentina, feminists knew that the language of rights was a powerful “structural resource.”<sup>60</sup> Thus, identifying abortion as a human right would strengthen their stance.

The movement also framed abortion as a public health issue, focusing on the deaths of women caused by clandestine abortions. This approach was meant to target both the public (by appealing to their empathy) and the legislative bodies. The National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion asserted that without political change, the government was not fulfilling its responsibility to protect lives and that the illegality of abortion was “condemning women...to death.”<sup>61</sup> They pointed out that women had been driven by necessity to these unsafe practices. Without the option for legal abortion, women

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<sup>59</sup> Mariela Belski, “The Cost of Not Approving Legal Abortion in Argentina,” Amnesty International, August 3, 2018, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/08/the-cost-of-not-approving-legal-abortion-in-argentina/>.

<sup>60</sup> Morgan, “Reproductive Rights or Reproductive Justice?”

<sup>61</sup> kamala, “CUANDO LOS DERECHOS HUMANOS NO LLEGAN A LAS HUMANAS | RIMAweb,” *RIMAweb* (blog), July 27, 2010, <http://www.rimaweb.com.ar/articulos/2010/cuando-los-derechos-humanos-no-llegan-a-las-humanas/>.

who wanted to end their pregnancy were forced to “disregard the law.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, the government itself was committing violence against women through its inaction – a conclusion that suggested a comparison of the current government to the *junta*, one meant to inspire change through an avoidance of past atrocities.

#### **IV. Differing Perspectives**

The opponents of the abortion movement, though fewer in number than pro-choice supporters, are powerful. Argentina is primarily a Catholic country, and as such has strong ties to the Catholic Church – one of the main adversaries of the movement. The Catholic Church defends life from the moment of conception – abortion is not permissible, as the opinion of the people does not matter, only principles and values.<sup>63</sup> Paradoxically, Argentina was not necessarily condemned by the Church for the previous legislature permitting exceptions. Via the Catholic premise of the “doctrine of double effect,” abortion is actually morally permissible in some cases (such as when the mother’s life is in danger).<sup>64</sup> The current Pope, Pope Francis, is from Argentina and as such his word carries more weight than his predecessors in this debate. He himself has made several public statements, especially following the success of the 2018 bill in the lower house of Congress.<sup>65</sup> Most notably, he denounced abortion as the “white glove equivalent of the Nazi-era eugenics program.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> kamala.

<sup>63</sup> Katy Watson, “No Going Back: The Two Sides in Argentina’s Abortion Debate,” *BBC News*, August 7, 2018, sec. Latin America & Caribbean, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-45096704>.

<sup>64</sup> Lynn M. Morgan, “The Dublin Declaration on Maternal Health Care and Anti-Abortion Activism: Examples from Latin America,” *Health and Human Rights Journal* (blog), June 2, 2017, <https://www.hhrjournal.org/2017/06/the-dublin-declaration-on-maternal-health-care-and-anti-abortion-activism-examples-from-latin-america-2/>.

<sup>65</sup> Fierro and Vasco, “The Struggle for Abortion Rights in Argentina | International Socialist Review.”

<sup>66</sup> The Associated Press, “Pope Calls Abortion ‘White Glove’ Equivalent of Nazi Crimes - The New York Times,” *The New York Times*, June 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/16/world/europe/pope-abortion-nazi-crimes.html>.

The Church backs the anti-abortion movement, which has begun to develop in Argentina in response to the growing pro-choice sentiment. After pro-life advocates recognized the power of and support for the “green tide” of their opponents, they adopted the *pañuelo celeste* – a sky blue handkerchief, like the Argentine flag, to align their movement with national identity.<sup>67</sup> A founder of one group explained this choice as part of a “cultural battle,” that if they do not fight for “the vulnerable, it is difficult to have an identity as a state or as a country.”<sup>68</sup> Because the movement focuses on the protection of life, one of their main slogans is “In Defense of the Two Lives,” referring to both the mother and the fetus.<sup>69</sup> A spokeswoman for one anti-abortion group referred to an abortion bill as “a bill to discard Argentines,” firmly characterizing abortion as unjustified murder.<sup>70</sup> These activists view the ratification of abortion legislature as a government sanctioning of murder.

In contrast to the Catholic Church, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo have made official statements showing their support for the Marea Verde. Hebe de Bonafini, president of the *Asociación* faction, spoke out at the 2012 Congress for the Egalitarian Access to Safe Abortion; she was in favor of defending “the life of women...deprived from rights.”<sup>71</sup> Nora Cortiñas, member of the *Línea Fundadora*, clarified in a statement that although the topic is controversial for the Madres as “dadoras de vida” [life-givers] and Catholics, she considers the abortion movement part of the greater fight for freedom [of rights] that the Madres

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<sup>67</sup> Emma Conn, “The ‘Pañuelización’ of Argentine Protest Culture,” *The Bubble* (blog), July 26, 2018, <https://www.thebubble.com/the-panuelizacion-of-argentine-protest-culture>.

<sup>68</sup> Ana Ionova, “Argentina’s Growing Anti-Abortion Movement,” *New Internationalist*, July 22, 2019, <https://newint.org/features/2019/07/22/argentina-pro-life-doctors-are-growing-force-against-abortion>.

<sup>69</sup> Reuters, “Anti-Abortion Activists Rally in Argentina,” *euronews*, March 24, 2019, <https://www.euronews.com/2019/03/24/anti-abortion-activists-rally-in-argentina>.

<sup>70</sup> “Argentina Braces Anew for Abortion Battle,” *France 24*, March 4, 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200304-argentina-braces-anew-for-abortion-battle>.

<sup>71</sup> Sutton and Borland, “Framing Abortion Rights in Argentina’s Encuentros Nacionales de Mujeres,” 202



support.<sup>72</sup> In 2018 after the Senate rejected the IVE bill, Nora Cortiñas again spoke out in favor of abortion. She blamed the Church, saying that religion has nothing to do with a health law like the one debated and that she will apostatize. She also reminded listeners of the actions of the Church while the *junta* harmed citizens (focusing on women) – “eso permitían, y miraban para otro lado” [they allowed it and looked the other way].<sup>73</sup> Because the Madres are such a respected, well-known, and socially powerful group in Argentina, their support has a profound impact on the Marea Verde (similar to how the Church’s support carries significant weight for the opposition).

By studying the example of the Madres, and more importantly, by emulating their tactics, the Marea Verde waged a successful campaign to transform public opinion and eventually enact transformative legal change with regards to a woman’s right to an abortion.

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<sup>72</sup> Graciela Di Marco, Alejandra Brener, and Nora Cortinas, “Hablan las Madres y Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo,” n.d., 9.

<sup>73</sup> “Nora Cortiñas: ‘Voy a Apostatar’ - La Retaguardia,” La Retaguardia, accessed April 16, 2021, <http://www.laretaguardia.com.ar/2018/08/nora-cortinas-apostasia.html?m=1>.

## Chapter Three: Identities and Framing

### I. Introduction

In this chapter, I first analyze the Madres' strategic uses of frames and social identities, which they developed to further their cause and influence. These methods of definition and identification have been important tools in many social movements as they are helpful in creating connections with members, listeners, and opponents.

I then examine the ways in which the Marea Verde employed these methods. The legacy of a compelling and unique movement such as the Madres has proven to be enduring and influential in transforming social movement theory. Their radical methods have demonstrated their effectiveness in achieving the various accomplishments that contribute to the Madres' renown. The Madres' reputation has been appealing to many other movements who wish to emulate their success. The Marea Verde make use of the political frames and identifying language popularized in Argentina by the Madres to maximize their impact in championing their cause. Finally, I will examine the successes of the Marea Verde as a result of these methods.

### II. Defining Frames

To better identify and discuss the use of frames in these movements, this section defines this idea and its accompanying aspects that stem from social movement theory. A frame denotes the "schemata of interpretation that enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life (...) and the world at large."<sup>74</sup> In other words, a frame is a social and collective construct of meaning in a social phenomenon, such as a

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<sup>74</sup> Snow et al., "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation," 464

movement. They offer individuals a perspective through which to view and interpret both events and other people. Framing, then, is the process by which these structures are formed and perpetuated. In framing, these meanings are created by social movements through intentional choices of language, symbols, and other forms of communication.

Frames can shift as the priorities or goals of their parent movements form and change. Frame alignment, one such way frames can change, refers to the processes that link “individual and SMO [social movement organization] interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary.”<sup>75</sup> In simpler words, if a movement’s ideal constituency deems a certain issue to be important, the movement will take care to make sure that, at the very least, they appear to also value the issue and work toward a resolution.

This process of alignment is important for social movements in order to appeal to desired constituents and supporters. Links between individuals and movements are formed on the basis of a collective identity comprised of similar interpretive orientations. By portraying their goals and values in such a way to match those of the desired individuals, movements increase the likelihood of their participation. The individuals feel that, because the movements appear to share in their collective identity, their ideological needs and goals are, or will be, met by the movement. Frame alignment processes, which differ according to the type and manner of linkage, are necessary to both attract and retain adherent and constituent participation.

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<sup>75</sup> Snow et al, 464.

### III. Madres de Plaza de Mayo

#### *Identities*

This section discusses the importance and effectiveness of the identities formed by the Madres during the time of the *junta militar*. Because of the *junta*'s desire for a fearful and isolated public, the Madres found it difficult to connect with each other and the community, both initially and throughout their campaign. The founding members of the Madres came together under shared duress as they traveled similar routes between military and government offices in search of information about their missing sons and daughters. Despite a "background of acknowledged differences" (e.g., socioeconomic status), the women came together with an "inclusive solidarity" due to the common ground of maternal worry.<sup>76</sup>

Over time, with the Madres' growing need to organize more formally, this solidarity transformed into a collective identity. The women were all mothers of *desaparecidos*, mothers of disappeared children. The Madres amplified and utilized this defining characteristic. By championing their maternal identity, the Madres created a form of socialized maternity. They no longer viewed maternity as an individualistic concept and instead considered themselves to be mothers and protectors of all children. Due to the absence of their own children, they were left "permanently pregnant (...) and [forced] to be them, to shout for them, to return them."<sup>77</sup> This image is meant to emphasize the Madres' maternity (as they still carry their children with them in memories and symbols) as well as to illustrate how the Madres work to ensure their children live on through their activism. With the maternal images evoked by the references to pregnancy and the *pañuelos*, the Madres

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<sup>76</sup> Ferree and Ewig, "Chapter 10. Global Feminist Organising: Identifying Patterns of Activism."

<sup>77</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 182.

force political and other public sphere actors to view them solely as mothers, bringing in elements of the private sphere of familial values to political awareness.

### *Framing*

In order to gain prominence and influence, the Madres needed to combat the powerful rhetoric employed by the *junta*. The political leaders framed their actions using “eschatological terms” to portray themselves as conducting a religious crusade with the goal of “preserving the God-given natural order...by eliminating subversion.”<sup>78</sup> The Madres needed to correct and supplant this mis-framing to combat the positive image of the *junta* and their actions. They made use of a frame alignment process called “frame transformation” in order to achieve a systematic alteration of meaning.<sup>79</sup> Frame transformation is a process of redefining narrative components already made meaningful through one primary framework in the terms of another.<sup>80</sup> Frame transformation creates a narrative different from the one deemed unsatisfactory so that people are able to use it to look at the world in a new perspective. Here, frame transformation was necessary to subvert the *junta*’s framework in favor of that of the Madres. As such, the Madres presented a narrative that focused on their children solely as their innocent children, repeatedly rejecting the claims that these *desaparecidos* were involved in subversive activities. Without this justification for the disappearances, the abductions carried out by the *junta* became unjust and thus, inexcusable.

This adoption of an injustice frame, one that categorized the once-tolerable disappearances as inexcusable did not alone necessitate action. To do so, the Madres needed

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<sup>78</sup> Bouvard, 23.

<sup>79</sup> Snow et al., “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation.”

<sup>80</sup> Snow et al.

to facilitate a “corresponding shift in attributional orientation.”<sup>81</sup> The Madres supported a shift from victim-blaming (i.e., the claim that the *desaparecidos* are dangerous subversives) to institutional or system-blaming (blaming the *junta*). They chose emotionally resonant language intended to “clarify political events (...) and [unmask] government policies.”<sup>82</sup> Most strikingly, they “equated the deeds of the military *junta* with those of the Nazis in the extermination camps” through the use of slogans proclaiming genocide.<sup>83</sup> The comparison was meant to target the *junta* by inciting and promoting an unfavorable image, one antithetical to that which the Madres aspired to create.

The Madres had to then define the purpose and activities of their own movement to garner support and attract participation. They attempted to amplify and idealize values inherent to the movement that were “presumed basic to prospective constituents [such as familial values] but which [had] not inspired collective action” due to fear, oppression, and isolation.<sup>84</sup> They presented themselves as idealized versions of mothers who were available to all through the socialization of maternity, claiming all the *desaparecidos* and the next generation of Argentine youths as their own children, which allowed them to build their movement off of these equal ties of affection.<sup>85</sup> The Madres’ “democratic and humane values” acted as an antithesis of and an alternative to the *junta militar*.<sup>86</sup>

The amplification of these principles served to “expand the frame of reference” for politics.<sup>87</sup> The *junta* attempted to contain the discourse within established political channels

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<sup>81</sup> Snow et al.

<sup>82</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 131.

<sup>83</sup> Bouvard 131

<sup>84</sup> Snow et al., “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation.”

<sup>85</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 5

<sup>86</sup> Bouvard 59

<sup>87</sup> Bouvard 253

through their frame of subversion and partisan politics, but the Madres introduced a political dialogue that espoused the ideals of justice and human rights, thus directing attention to the ethics of politics. In shaping a new perspective through which to judge governmental action, the Madres created a space within the Argentine political consciousness for moral considerations.<sup>88</sup>

The Madres further emphasized the importance of both adherent and constituent participation in their movement through belief amplification; they specifically targeted the “belief about the probability of change or the efficacy of collective action.”<sup>89</sup> The Madres supported this belief by asserting the capacity of the individual to effect change. They focused on the individual because a lack of individual action precludes the mobilization of the collective. If the individual feels that their contribution is insignificant or ineffective, they will become disincentivized to act. Thus, they launched a campaign specifically targeted at inspiring individuals. The Madres’ message to the public, that “we can take hold of our destinies and that we all have the capacity...if we make up our minds to do so,” underscores the human ability to have an impact given focused action.<sup>90</sup> This message, coupled with shame stemming from the idea that middle-aged and older women were forced to leave their traditional roles to effect political change, urged public action. Prominent members of the Madres also acted to ensure that member participation remained high despite the possible violent consequences. Azucena de De Vicente (also known as Azucena Villaflor), an influential founding member of the Madres, charged the members of the movement with

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<sup>88</sup> Bouvard 216

<sup>89</sup> Snow et al., “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation.”

<sup>90</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 13

protesting against the *junta* by telling them “if you let down your guard, they will triumph.”<sup>91</sup> By appealing to the individual mothers to continue contributing, De Vicente helped to ensure the survival of the movement through the necessary collective action, essential for its success.

#### **IV. Marea Verde**

##### *Identities*

Abortion activists experienced, to a lesser degree, a similar type of isolation when dealing with reproductive issues due to prejudice and propriety. Over time, through participating in *Encuentros* and forming networks, these women joined in solidarity given their shared interest in reproductive law. This common ground, the commitment as women to the equal provision of this human right, endured despite differences in “class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, and age.”<sup>92</sup>

Like with the Madres, this solidarity evolved into a collective identity as the Marea Verde developed. These activists are women, and amplify this characteristic. They emphasize that their femininity is not tied to motherhood; they remain women even without fulfilling this societal expectation. These activists also identify themselves as champions of human rights. These assertions both reject and call on the legacy and identities of the Madres, respectively, and are exemplified in the symbols emblematic of the movement. During marches and other movement activities, activists frequently decorated their bodies and faces using green paint (the color associated with the movement), usually with the female symbol

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<sup>91</sup> Bouvard 78

<sup>92</sup> “Assessing the ‘Green Tide,’” CFFP, March 9, 2020, <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/journal/2020/3/9/assessing-the-green-tide-an-international-human-rights-advocacy-analysis-of-the-national-campaign-for-legal-safe-and-free-abortion-of-2018-in-argentina>.



(♀) prominently displayed. This labeling identifies the activists as women, not mothers, who are deserving of rights because of their individual personhood and not their kinship ties. This symbol represents the assertion that the women are women without any conditions of motherhood, standing in opposition to and rejecting the legacy of the Madres as women defined by their motherhood. Although rejecting the collective identity of the Madres by publicizing their identity as women, the Marea Verde embraced their strategy in doing so. They followed the example of the Madres in bringing in elements of the private sphere of femininity to political awareness. The second symbol, the pro-choice activists' *pañuelos verdes*, features a stylized version of the *pañuelos* worn by the Madres. The reference to these historical revolutionaries lends support and credence to the activists' collective identity as advocates for human rights, thus calling on the similar identity of the Madres.

### *Framing*

In order to effectively conduct a campaign of change, pro-choice advocates needed to reframe the situation and their efforts to push back against the established rhetoric of the status quo and the opposition. In this case, the opposing rhetoric would be that of the government and Catholic Church as well as pro-life groups. These anti-abortion groups drew parallels between the horrific actions of the *junta militar* and abortion by appropriating as a slogan the title of the 1984 CONADEP report meant to document and investigate the disappearances and executions: *Nunca Más* [never again].<sup>93</sup> Pairing this slogan of *Nunca Más* with images of pregnant women and chanting about the murder of innocents served to place abortion within the context of the *junta* and define it as a crime against humanity. Another

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<sup>93</sup> Morgan, "Reproductive Rights or Reproductive Justice?"

common slogan, meant to frame the pro-life activism as a positive force against the evil of abortion, was *Salvemos las 2 vidas* [let's save both lives].

Pro-choice activists, to combat the portrayal of abortion as murder, pushed back against the idea that anti-abortion laws and organizations were saving lives. The Marea Verde chose to pursue a public health and human rights-based interpretive framework to subvert that of the opposition. A viral tweet by journalist Marcela Ojeda encapsulates this idea perfectly: “Aren’t we going to raise our voice? They’re killing us.”<sup>94</sup> Instead of crediting the law for saving lives, this frame transformation newly defined the ban on abortion as immoral and inexcusable due to the thousands of deaths it caused as numerous women resorted to unsafe procedures when left without legal recourse.<sup>95</sup> In another link to the Madres and in accordance with their collective identity as human rights advocates, abortion activists classify the legalization of abortion as a human right and condemned the legal ban as having “deprived [women] from their rights.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, the illegality of abortion is framed as unjust and immoral – it resulted in a public health crisis and went against the Argentine legal tradition of human rights popularized by the Madres.

The shift in the characterization of women who abort as murderers to those being murdered reflects the corresponding shift in the attributional orientation. The government and pro-life groups chose to frame in such a way that painted women as the perpetrators of the crime of abortion, equating them with the *junta* as violators of human rights. The Marea

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<sup>94</sup> Daniel Politi and Ernesto Londoño, “They Lost Argentina’s Abortion Vote, but Advocates Started a Movement,” *The New York Times*, August 9, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/09/world/americas/argentina-abortion-laws-south-america.html>.

<sup>95</sup> Daby and Moseley, “Argentina Is about to Debate Legalizing Abortion — despite Being a Very Catholic Country.”

<sup>96</sup> Sutton and Borland, “Framing Abortion Rights in Argentina’s Encuentros Nacionales de Mujeres.”

Verde, however, blamed the institutions of authority and justice for creating a system that forced women to resort to drastic measures (such as clandestine abortion). Pro-choice activists used the language of *Nunca más* as well, choosing to carry slogans that read “*aborto clandestine, nunca más*” [clandestine abortion, never again] thus equating the fate of “women forced into clandestinity” to the fate of those forcibly disappeared.<sup>97</sup> The connection effectively portrayed that both the Madres and the Marea Verde work to help these victims, with the Madres championing the *desaparecidos* and the Marea Verde championing women suffering under the abortion ban. With the use of *Nunca más*, the Marea Verde equated the consequences of illegal abortion legislature to the *junta*’s genocidal policies, a comparison meant to target their government by inciting and promoting an unfavorable image. By creating a frame that portrayed their movement as defending human rights against governmental violations, the Marea Verde situated their cause within the ethical space created by the Madres.

The Marea Verde, like the Madres, used framing to attract participation and support for the movement and the legal changes they endorse. Abortion remains a highly stigmatized term within Argentina. Thus, when the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion proposed legislation to Congress in 2018, they termed it the bill for the “Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy.”<sup>98</sup> This name change also changed the frame of meaning, and facilitated the transition from the “paradigm of criminalization [to] one of legality.”<sup>99</sup> The neutral language used meant that the bill was less likely to meet emotional resistance, thus hopefully attracting support for legalization.

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<sup>97</sup> Morgan, “Reproductive Rights or Reproductive Justice?”

<sup>98</sup> “Assessing the ‘Green Tide.’”

<sup>99</sup> “Assessing the ‘Green Tide.’”

Because equality is a cornerstone of the movement, activists strove to frame their ideology in a way that compelled and appealed to the majority of women to promote participation. They publicized individual stories of women who did not have access to abortions or who had been punished unfairly to emphasize the injustice of legal ban. One such story followed the imprisonment of a woman, known to the public by the pseudonym of Belén. In 2014, Belén suffered a miscarriage in a hospital. The staff, upon finding a fetus in a bathroom, claimed that it was hers without any evidence or DNA analysis. Belén was then arrested for unlawfully inducing an abortion.<sup>100</sup> One pro-choice advocate and author wrote a book entitled *Somos Belén* [We are Belén] that investigated her story.<sup>101</sup> The title of the book amplifies the connection between all women and Belén – it emphasizes that anyone could have experienced what she endured. To further this interpretation, women marched wearing identical masks that were labeled “*Somos Belén.*”<sup>102</sup> This display further obscured the identities of individual women in favor of connecting them all as potential victims, thus compelling them to join the movement through empathy and sympathy.

The Marea Verde framed their activities and goals through the lens of injustice and human rights to further the portrayal of their cause as warranted and worthy. The movement selected these frames due to their links to the Madres and their justifications in the fight against the *junta*. Because the Madres’ resistance to the *junta* became a successful revolution

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<sup>100</sup> “Argentina: Ruling to Release Woman Jailed after Miscarriage, a Step Forward for Human Rights,” Amnesty International, August 17, 2016, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/08/argentina-ruling-to-release-woman-jailed-after-miscarriage-a-step-forward-for-human-rights/>.

<sup>101</sup> Sonia Tessa, “Ana Correa, Autora de Somos Belén: ‘La Legalización Del Aborto Está Cerca Pero Es Importante Que Sigamos Movilizadas’ | El Libro Que Le Grita al Mundo Que En La Argentina Hay Presas Por Abortar,” PAGINA12, December 27, 2019, <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/237660-ana-correa-autora-de-somos-belen-la-legalizacion-del-aborto->.

<sup>102</sup> Natalia Torres, “Somos Belén: llega a las librerías la historia de la joven tucumana presa luego de sufrir un aborto espontáneo - Big Bang! News,” BigBang!News, October 31, 2019, <https://www.bigbangnews.com/actualidad/somos-belen-llega-a-las-librerias-la-historia-de-la-joven-tucumana-presa-luego-de-sufrir-un-aborto-espontaneo-20191031185314>.

for human rights that led to Argentina prioritizing human rights, these modern activists chose to classify abortion as a human right as well. This choice allowed them to frame the legalization of abortion as a “debt to democracy” – something that should have been given to the people along with the other human rights that were respected once again when the *junta* fell in favor of a more democratic government.<sup>103</sup> In pursuing the payment of a debt rightfully owed, the pro-choice activists undeniably placed their movement on the side of the ethically justified.

In order to cement this placement, the movement went further in linking their cause to the Madres, and the government to the *junta militar*, through the use of the *pañuelos*. By wearing their own version (the *pañuelo verde*), the abortion activists create an obvious frame that emphasizes their connections to the values of the Madres: respect for human rights and the struggle against injustice, especially injustice perpetuated by governmental policies. Displaying the *pañuelo* is a “performative act” – one that both connoted a similarity with the Madres as human rights advocates and allowed the public to identify the Marea Verde, facilitating the growth of the movement as it became more “political and collective.”<sup>104</sup> Because of the legacy and reputation of the Madres, the activists wearing the *pañuelo verde* recognizably emulate a respected, ethical, and successful social movement that stood against the injustice of political leaders. This framework is likely to appeal to prospective supporters and participants, thus increasing the strength of the movement.

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<sup>103</sup> “Quiénes somos – Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal Seguro y Gratuito.”

<sup>104</sup> Irene Caselli, “The Birth of a Movement: How Activists Are Winning the Battle to Make Abortion a Right,” *The Correspondent*, February 7, 2020, <https://thecorrespondent.com/277/the-birth-of-a-movement-how-activists-are-winning-the-battle-to-make-abortion-a-right/36669679101-ad3c0da9>.

Although increased participation is beneficial, language that bolsters the belief in the success of collective action by calling upon these participants to act is necessary to retain them. This type of incendiary language is most obvious in the two slogans connected to the movement. *Nunca más* is not just used as a reference to the *junta*. Its meaning, *never again*, incited the movement to act toward progress that would prevent the repetition of the past: one in which thousands of women died from abortion complications due to a law and society that refused to acknowledge or help them. *Ni una menos* is another slogan that has been connected to the movement. Though primarily connected to the movement against gender violence, this language has been used by abortion activists as well. Its meaning, *not one less*, necessitates action that will prevent the death of more women.<sup>105</sup> Each additional death connected to abortion complications, then, represented a failure of the Marea Verde and society to protect against these unnecessary deaths. The use of slogans that compel women to support the movement places the burden of responsibility on each activist. If progress could not be made legally or socially, the movement would have failed to support and protect the women of Argentina.

## **V. Conclusion**

The Madres movement used justice and humanitarian value-based frames to garner support for their dissension. They worked against the established rhetoric to expose the truth and gave meaning to their movement as defenders of human rights. The political dialogue the Madres engaged in emphasized the moral and ethical values of life and justice, thus setting a precedent in Argentine political awareness for the necessity of these ideals. The Marea

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<sup>105</sup> Daby and Moseley, “Argentina Is about to Debate Legalizing Abortion — despite Being a Very Catholic Country.”

Verde, drawing upon the success of the past, used symbols and slogans connected to the Madres to provide the framework for the construction of similar meaning. This contemporary movement needed to unequivocally portray itself as a cause for justice and rights in order to gain adherent and constituent support for such a stigmatized topic.

Their strategy of calling upon the Madres was successful; abortion had once been a highly taboo topic and practice in Argentina. The Marea Verde's use of frames and publicized identities rooted the movement within the moral space created by the Madres. This connection overcame the cultural stigma to attract a large number of supporters and participants and as the movement progressed, it contributed to the "social decriminalization" of abortion.<sup>106</sup> Symbols of the Marea Verde can be found everywhere – the *pañuelos verdes* are tied to backpacks, used as masks, or worn as bracelets in everyday life. The debate allowed these themes to be something common, talked about by "*hombres charlando en un café, que...era algo que nunca había sucedido* [men chatting in a café, something that had never happened before]."<sup>107</sup> Through framing and meaning, the movement has been successful in creating a metaphorical *marea verde* [green tide], so much so that the term has become a reference name for the movement, thereby amplifying the visibility of resistance to the illegality of abortion. This visibility, reinforced by the prevalence of the symbols of the Marea Verde, has in turn supported the creation of a space in the public sphere that enabled them to effectively advocate for legalization.

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<sup>106</sup> "Assessing the 'Green Tide.'"

<sup>107</sup> "Por qué seguimos marchando hacia el aborto legal en Argentina."

## Chapter Four: Movement Structure and Public Presence

### I. Introduction

The precedent set by the Madres, one of a movement successful in making use of available resources despite clear challenges, led the contemporary Marea Verde to adopt and formalize these similar effective methods. The Madres faced both the *junta militar* and traditional expectations for women, but managed to appeal to the media, international allies, and women within a patriarchal society to mobilize a force powerful enough to challenge the status quo. In doing so, they created a space for women as political actors, a space for activism in groups previously excluded from this realm. The Marea Verde took advantage of this space and the legacy of the Madres by adopting recognizable symbols and strategies to advance their cause and pressure the government.

This chapter explores the more concrete methods used to influence the Argentine government and legal system. I first analyze the structure of the Madres' movement and their methods of gaining political visibility. I then consider the similar strategies used by the Marea Verde and demonstrate how the contemporary movement specifically succeeded in influencing governmental opinion and legal change.

### II. *Machismo* and patriarchal culture in Argentina

To fully understand the ways in which the two movements fit in and interact with the Argentine society, knowledge of elements and ideas prevalent in the culture is essential. Argentina's culture is influenced by complementary patriarchal and *machismo* ideals. The



term “patriarchy” denotes a type of social organization where authority is held by the male head of the family. The family is one of the basic institutions of this social order.<sup>108</sup>

*Machismo*, a component of patriarchal society, is a concept referring to the idea that men are aggressively dominant over women.<sup>109</sup> It favors men exhibiting the more aggressive masculine traits that are associated with power and control. Although patriarchal ideas are found globally, *machismo* is a cultural element fundamentally important to Latin America. These two societal models influence the values and expectations held with regard to women. In both a patriarchal society and a *machismo* culture, women are expected to stay in the house and to fulfill domestic duties. Women, considered to be the weaker and more submissive gender, are assigned to the private sphere of the household to nurture the family, the vital and nuclear form of society. These concepts are pervasive in Argentina; in 2016 the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women denounced the “entrenched patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes” present in the country.<sup>110</sup> Overall, a traditional Argentine society has generally regarded the male as the “dominant figure, [...] the undisputed head of the home” and the “sole participant in public life.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Marta Fontenla, “¿Qué Es El Patriarcado?,” *Mujeres en Red*, 2008, <http://www.mujeresenred.net/spip.php?article1396>.

<sup>109</sup> Miranda Carnes, “Machismo and Gender Equality in Argentina,” Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, September 28, 2017, <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/machismo-and-gender-equality-in-argentina>.

<sup>110</sup> “OHCHR | UN Special Rapporteur Challenges Argentina to Step up Protection of Women in ‘Machismo Culture,’” United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, November 21, 2016, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?LangID=E&NewsID=20903>.

<sup>111</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 65

### III. Madres de Plaza de Mayo

#### *Movement Structure*

One of the most revolutionary, and ultimately influential, aspects of the Madres movement stems from their identities. As women, they were already expected to stay in the home by the patriarchal society; motherhood only strengthened this expectation. In defiance of traditional gender roles, the Madres took up the mantle of their children and became activists in their name.

This move, from the household to the streets, meant that the Madres created a movement that spanned two spheres: the private and the public. Their identities and symbols, meaningful in the private sphere of the household, became meaningful in the public sphere of politics as well. Their movement can thus be classified as a boundary movement. A boundary movement is a movement that moves “between social worlds and realms of knowledge” and blurs pre-existing distinctions.<sup>112</sup> Boundary movements blur the lines between experts and laypeople in a certain body of knowledge and move fluidly across organizations, institutions, and identities in ways that are restricted from traditional social movements. These types of movements make significant use of boundary objects (“objects that overlap different social worlds and are malleable enough to be used by different parties”), often as important symbols.<sup>113</sup> Overall, boundary movements are more flexible, transcending the limitations of traditional activism by incorporating aspects from more than one sphere of society.

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<sup>112</sup> McCormick, Brown, and Zavestoski, “The Personal Is Scientific, the Scientific Is Political.”

<sup>113</sup> McCormick, Brown, and Zavestoski.

The Madres reconstructed society's view of accepted activity when they, as traditionally non-political actors, chose to step outside of the household sphere. Although their movement was interpreted as a political stand, the Madres continued to identify as mothers, not political actors. Despite this assertion, their efforts were political – in pursuing the disappearances of their children, the mothers naturally became opponents and critics of the *junta militar*, thus entering into the political realm. Their movement blurred lines: the Madres self-identified themselves as actors from the private sphere where, in *machismo* culture, they were expected to remain, while the reality of their movement assigned them to the public domain. The mothers were challenging the traditional distinction between the male sphere (the public and political) and the female sphere (the private and domestic) by moving into and engaging with the male sphere as females. Thus, traditional demarcations between what was considered to be acceptable from the perspective of a patriarchal culture needed to change to accommodate the quasi-movement, thus allowing the Madres to set a precedent for female activism in Argentina.

In boundary movements, the “expert” refers to an actor experienced in the relevant body of knowledge. For this analysis of social movements and activism, the relevant field is political science. In this way, an expert is referring to an individual who is accustomed to and knowledgeable about the political sphere and activism. The women of the Madres, previously constrained to the private sphere, would be considered the laypeople. With the formation of the Madres as a group, the distinction between laypeople and experts became less clear – individuals without intimate knowledge of or practice in political action became practicing activists, operating as experts, in a relatively short timeframe. Because the Madres belonged to both areas of society, their movement moved across both areas of knowledge easily; the

women were using methods of protest to effectively exert political pressure while still championing a message and cause integral to their households. Their political style “combined the attitudes and practices of the private space of home and family with the space of their public lives,” resulting in the “continual weaving of the intimate and public.”<sup>114</sup>

Most important to the Madres, and the most recognizable emblem of their movement, is their choice in boundary object. Early on in organizing, the mothers began wearing white *pañuelos* as shawls around their heads so as to easily recognize each other in crowds and to visibly declare their allegiance and message to others. A *pañuelo* is a child’s cloth diaper, an object important to the household and representative of motherhood. The image of the diaper as a shawl, when used by the Madres, became a symbol that represented “a reality in stark contrast to the brutality of the military regime,” one with “family bonds and ethical values in the public arena.”<sup>115</sup> Even now, this common domestic item is the object most associated with the movement as the Madres’ defining symbol. The *pañuelo* is a boundary object, given meaning in two different social spheres and flexible enough to be used in a variety of ways to signify these meanings, depending on the context.

Before the Madres, there was “no lens through which people could perceive or understand a totally new phenomenon in Argentina” – the intrusion of women and familial, humanitarian values into the public arena.<sup>116</sup> As women in a traditional society “imbued with the values of *machismo*, the Madres had to overcome the “psychological, social, and political” restraints that kept them in the private sphere.<sup>117</sup> As pioneers, the Madres were

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<sup>114</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 98

<sup>115</sup> Bouvard 75

<sup>116</sup> Bouvard 170

<sup>117</sup> Bouvard 244

forced to face the brunt of patriarchal culture without the ability to recall prior, similar movements for additional legitimacy. Familial disapproval and social isolation were common in the beginning. However, by continuing to depart from set norms and expected behavior, the Madres “enlarged their political space and the space for their perceptions,”<sup>118</sup> helping to break through the “barriers of ridicule and social prohibition.”<sup>119</sup> With the creation of this new public space, the Madres acted as pioneers in blurring traditional boundaries of expected behavior, setting a new precedent in Argentina for female activism.

Motherhood, previously a private experience, became socialized and politicized through the activities of the Madres. Something to be shared with the national public and among the group, maternity became politically relevant as the Madres displayed and declared obvious ties to the private sphere of the home and family as an “act of defiance and a dramatization of a different social order that combined the two spheres.”<sup>120</sup> The Madres’ crossing of the boundaries between the public and private spheres resulted in the mixing of political activism, ethical and familial values, traditional gender roles, and society. Their subversion of societal expectations for women, especially for aging mothers, was made more blatant by their favored method of protest: public marches and gatherings.

### *Public Gathering*

Like the *pañuelos*, another unchanging reminder of the Madres is their ritual Thursday march around the Plaza de Mayo, a weekly event that continues even today.

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<sup>118</sup> Bouvard 244

<sup>119</sup> Bouvard 249

<sup>120</sup> Bouvard 254

Though now an expected occurrence, when the Madres first began, their gatherings in the street signified their revolutionary move to the public sphere.

The Plaza de Mayo is “the seat of power” in Argentina, flanked by the most important banks, the cathedral, and the presidential palace (the Casa Rosada).<sup>121</sup> People regularly cross the square to shop and conduct business at the banks or government offices. During the dictatorship, there was an “omnipresent security police” force that discouraged gatherings, as the *junta* had outlawed large protests and carefully cultivated a culture of isolation and secrecy.<sup>122</sup>

The Madres gathered and marched weekly in this seat of power, demanding governmental accountability. This strategy was revolutionary as the marches were in direct opposition to the *junta* due both to their initial existence and their blatant continuation. The Madres “thrust themselves into [public areas], thus defying a secretive political system” in order to effectively claim political power.<sup>123</sup> By gathering so publicly and repeatedly, the Madres came out of the societal invisibility of the private sphere imposed upon them by patriarchal and *machismo* values. They established a powerful ethical, political, and historical presence that allowed them to construct a space for their cause in the “political and ethical consciousness” of Argentina.<sup>124</sup> The individual, private question of the *desaparecidos* and maternal values, when asked in this space, became a public issue that necessitated an answer from the *junta*.

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<sup>121</sup> Bouvard 2

<sup>122</sup> Bouvard 2

<sup>123</sup> Bouvard 14

<sup>124</sup> Bouvard 62

The Madres' strategic location choice of a public plaza in front of the executive office of Argentina emphasized both the power their presence afforded them and the political nature of their cause. The Plaza de Mayo, as their gathering place, became a "geography of dissent" that served as the physical manifestation of the Madres' fight for justice and human rights.<sup>125</sup> Their overt demonstrations of activism in the plaza forced the *junta* to take notice of their public presence and political message, inciting ridicule and violence. The gatherings signified a change in citizen opinions and that the Madres were "people [who] think for themselves."<sup>126</sup> The persistent, public defiance of the Madres worked to make public gatherings powerful and central elements of their campaign. The strategy ultimately was a "means of entering the political dialogue [and] demonstrating the cohesion of participants" against the tyranny of the *junta*.<sup>127</sup>

Through their distinct and conspicuous presence, the Madres set a precedent for this type of social movement: one that defied traditional boundaries. Their marches in front of government buildings effectively politicized an issue that had previously been understood to be a private and personal experience. The Madres demonstrated that public gatherings could transform a significant location into a geography that "not only reflected power and dissent but also celebrated" their unique cause, thus aiding in the advertisement of the movement.<sup>128</sup>

### *International Attention*

To achieve progress, the Madres needed to prevent their movement from being silenced by the *junta*. The public gatherings drew both good and bad attention: the

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<sup>125</sup> Bouvard 60

<sup>126</sup> Bouvard 234

<sup>127</sup> Bouvard 231

<sup>128</sup> Bouvard 2

government ordered military and police to harass and intimidate the women, but citizens and news outlets began to follow the movement as well. The Madres made an effort to talk to journalists and media representatives. They knew that to effectively work against their own government, they would require a large base of support.<sup>129</sup> The Madres focused on global news to appeal to international allies, a tactic following the boomerang model of social movement theory. The boomerang model is a concept describing movements where “international [actors] respond to [...] local activists, often from marginalized populations, for assistance in addressing local needs.”<sup>130</sup> The Madres, as a marginalized group, were required to draw on the strength and influence of outside actors to effectively confront and counteract the political, military, and legal power of the *junta*.

The Madres sent out numerous letters to foreign political leaders and television networks and traveled internationally to appeal directly to foreign governments for support in their defense of human rights. This networking allowed the Madres to create an international presence and reputation that could be used to influence their own government.<sup>131</sup> Their first and most important source of support was the Support Group for the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, an organization founded by the wife of the Prime Minister of the Netherlands.<sup>132</sup> This group organized demonstrations, raised funds, and pressured their own governments to oppose the *junta*.<sup>133</sup> Many other similar support groups formed as the Madres continued to claim a space “in opinion sectors throughout the world for their plight and for their humanitarian values.”<sup>134</sup> Foreign leaders and human rights commissions publicized their

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<sup>129</sup> Bouvard 81

<sup>130</sup> Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*.

<sup>131</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 14

<sup>132</sup> Bouvard 256

<sup>133</sup> Bouvard 86

<sup>134</sup> Bouvard 89



revulsion for the *junta*'s activities and expressed their support for the Madres as their reputation grew.<sup>135</sup>

The public indictments of the *junta* by foreign governments and organizations contributed heavily to the pressure the dictatorship faced. In 1979 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the OAS published a report that categorized the actions of the *junta* as human rights abuses and violations of freedom after completing a fact-finding mission in Argentina, where they heard testimonies from the Madres.<sup>136</sup> The report was "very influential in focusing world public opinion" on the abuses in Argentina.<sup>137</sup> This scrutiny and condemnation led to a diminishment in disappearances by the *junta*, demonstrating its impact.<sup>138</sup> In addition to maintaining its international reputation, the *junta* struggled with securing foreign aid. The U.S. Congress, for example, "cut off all military aid and sales" to Argentina in 1977 after reports of human rights violations.<sup>139</sup>

The Madres followed the boomerang model in establishing international support networks because they recognized the "power of the international media in drawing attention to political oppression and the abuse of human rights."<sup>140</sup> Their publicization of the violations perpetuated by the *junta* led to both increased pressure on the government and "economic,

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<sup>135</sup> Bouvard 99

<sup>136</sup> David Weissbrodt and Maria Luisa Bartolomei, "The Effectiveness of International Human Rights Pressures: The Case of Argentina, 1976-1983," *MINNESOTA LAW REVIEW* 75 (1991): 29; Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 97.

<sup>137</sup> Weissbrodt and Bartolomei, "The Effectiveness of International Human Rights Pressures: The Case of Argentina, 1976-1983"; Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 97.

<sup>138</sup> Bouvard 97

<sup>139</sup> Weissbrodt and Bartolomei, "The Effectiveness of International Human Rights Pressures: The Case of Argentina, 1976-1983."

<sup>140</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 89

political, and moral backing” for the Madres, allowing them to continue to publicly oppose the dictatorship from within the country.<sup>141</sup>

#### **IV. Marea Verde**

##### *Movement Structure*

The Marea Verde are not solely focused on legalizing abortion by going through political channels to change the law. Instead, they combine different strategies such as making the issue more visible (by appealing to the people, as discussed in the previous chapter) or finding ways to increase access to safe abortions for women before the law changed.<sup>142</sup> This aspect of the Marea Verde movement, labeled “misoprostol activism” after the drug often used in Argentina to safely cause an abortion, focuses on providing information and resources to women in need.<sup>143</sup>

Like the Madres, the Marea Verde movement can be classified as a boundary movement through two different channels. The first, which deals solely with the misoprostol activism, has been discussed in previous literature. The second, referring to the movement as a whole, has not. This section discusses both.

Misoprostol activists, as a subsection of the Marea Verde movement, primarily focus on providing counseling and information to women seeking an abortion. This type of activism flows between “activism, medical practice, and epidemiological knowledge production.”<sup>144</sup> The activists dedicated to this work find themselves, as laypeople, taking on

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<sup>141</sup> Bouvard 257

<sup>142</sup> McReynolds-Pérez, “Misoprostol for the Masses.”

<sup>143</sup> McReynolds-Pérez.

<sup>144</sup> McReynolds-Pérez.

the roles of experts by providing medical advice or counseling (often without professional training). The boundary object, in my own analysis, would be that of the drug misoprostol itself. Primarily produced to treat gastric ulcers (thus already significant in the pharmaceutical and medical world), political activists now distribute the drug as a method to induce abortions. This additional use of misoprostol allows the drug to take on new meanings in the medical and political realms. The new political role played by this medication underlines the boundary movement characteristic of the Marea Verde.

The Marea Verde social movement as a whole can be classified as a boundary movement in a different way. Similar to the Madres, the concepts of *machismo* culture and a patriarchal society are important regarding this movement as many of the activists are women and so must contend with the gendered expectations of society. Traditional values of femininity recommend that women stay at home to tend to domestic tasks and to prepare for motherhood. As such, like the Madres, the women entering the public sphere to protest against forced motherhood did so in defiance of gender roles “as a group working on behalf of issues affecting their households and community, linking the public and private” in a form of political behavior first displayed in Argentina by the Madres.<sup>145</sup>

Much like the Madres, the women of the Marea Verde also blurred the lines between experts and laypeople by becoming political activists without experience and against tradition as dictated by *machismo* culture. The women learned, both from the efforts of the Madres and their own attempts, the most effective strategies for activism when advocating for a topic rooted in the private sphere.

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<sup>145</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 237

The Marea Verde chose the *pañuelo* as their boundary object, copying the Madres. Although the contemporary movement chose to emulate the Madres in adopting this symbolic item, the Marea Verde differentiated between their two movements by changing its color. The *pañuelos* used by the Madres are white, while the Marea Verde chose green as their identifying symbol – a color often associated with health and not concretely associated with other social movements in Argentina.<sup>146</sup>

The *pañuelo verde* is significant both for the household (in its primary function as a diaper) and for political struggle (in its secondary function as the defining symbol for the Marea Verde). However, the *pañuelo verde* also retains historical significance as a symbol for human rights, justice, and triumph due to its connections to and association with the Madres. The Marea Verde, similar to the Madres, used their own version of the *pañuelos* to represent a reality in contrast to the government – one that prioritized the justice, human rights, and ethical values that the government claimed to protect. In this way, by appropriating an object already imbued with significance, the Marea Verde cross between the private sphere of the household, the public political sphere, and the historical realm of knowledge.

The Madres provided a model of unusual activism that set a precedent for movements that politicize individual, female issues. Their defiance of patriarchal expectations created a new space for women in politics and a new perspective for Argentina, one not beholden to traditional gender roles. The Marea Verde were able to draw from the example of this

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<sup>146</sup> Conn, “The ‘Pañuelización’ of Argentine Protest Culture”; Camila Montañez, “The Green Hankerchief: The New Symbol of the International Women’s Resistance,” International Planned Parenthood, March 8, 2019, <https://www.ippfwhr.org/resource/the-green-hankerchief-the-new-symbol-of-the-international-womens-resistance/>.

historical movement to effectively organize as women in the male-dominated public sphere and establish a movement that championed abortion as a political and public issue.

### *Public Gathering*

The Marea Verde drew on the Madres' legacy and situated their own movement within the space for activism that they created. These contemporary female activists adopted and formalized the methods used by the Madres. When the Madres gathered, they walked around the square. This activity, though quiet in nature, remained a defiant act given the societal and political climate. In contrast, the gatherings of the Marea Verde were open protests that included speeches, music, decorations, and multiple banners and signs. These gatherings are formalized and systematic versions of the marches of the Madres. They were meant to defy traditional, *machismo* gender stereotypes (i.e., the idea that women are meant for motherhood or that they belong in the household), the cultural stigma against abortion, and its illegality.

The activists of the Marea Verde situated their movement within the ethical space of politics created by the Madres by exploiting a similar paradigm of activism. Public marches and demonstrations are a highly significant political strategy in Argentina, as the Madres are famous for their traditional marches in the Plaza de Mayo. The *pañuelos*, similarly, are known internationally as a symbol for human rights and the Madres. The Marea Verde specifically chose to adopt the *pañuelos* as a defining symbol and to occupy a public plaza while displaying this symbol. The combination of these strategies served to link the Marea Verde to the Madres – the contemporary movement emulated the previous movement in order to further define their cause as an ethical defense of human rights.

The Marea Verde, following this example of the Madres, chose a significant public square to claim as their own “geography of dissent.” The Plaza del Congreso, their gathering place, is a public park facing the Argentine Congress building. While the Madres marched in front of the presidential palace, the seat of power of the *junta*, the Marea Verde gathered in front of the Congress, the governmental body with the authority to legalize abortion – both movements targeted the political authority relevant to their causes through their demonstrations. The Plaza, already politically meaningful through its connection to Congress, became associated with the Marea Verde, reflecting their “power and dissent” and celebrating their own struggle for human rights.

The huge *pañuelazos* of the Marea Verde were public spectacles, impossible to miss. The participants were, like the Madres, openly creating an ethical and political presence that defied an invisibility perpetuated by societal stigmas against abortion. The thousands of women of the Marea Verde entered the political dialogue through their physical presence and effectively displayed the cohesion of the participants and the strength of their convictions. Their goal was to demonstrate to the government that, like the Madres before them, the people thought for themselves and held opinions that were no longer accurately reflected by the law.

### *International Attention*

These public gatherings by the Marea Verde attracted a huge number of people – women attended in the thousands. With this increased number of participants, the media attention increased as well to document the *pañuelazos*. The physical and media presence of the Marea Verde had a real impact on viewer opinion. One young woman reported that, although she initially did not approve of the pro-choice movement, she was convinced by the

high number of supporters because she thought that “they can’t all be wrong.”<sup>147</sup> The public gatherings were important because they demonstrated the depth and breadth of public opinion, but the Marea Verde would have reached a relatively limited audience without media coverage of their activities.

The attention demanded by the Marea Verde was additionally important because it appealed to international organizations that then aided their cause. Like the Madres, the Marea Verde styled their movement after the boomerang model. These activists were fighting against a national issue, fighting against their own government to legalize abortion. Outside aid was influential in bolstering the position of the Marea Verde with their own government, to achieve the movement’s goals of effecting legal change and providing access to safer abortions.

Similar to the Madres, the Marea Verde found an ally in the Netherlands. Women on Waves, a Dutch pro-choice group, aims to provide women the “tools to resist repressive cultures and laws” by increasing their access to information and medical abortion.<sup>148</sup> This group supported the misoprostol activists of the Marea Verde by supplying the relevant drugs to women in need in Argentina, providing in-person counseling, and launching abortion hotlines that were then advertised on their website.<sup>149</sup>

The activism of the Marea Verde directed the attention of more international organizations to the consequences of illegal abortion in Argentina as well. Amnesty

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<sup>147</sup> Caselli, “The Birth of a Movement.”

<sup>148</sup> “Who Are We?,” Women on Waves, accessed April 16, 2021, <https://www.womenonwaves.org/en/page/650/who-are-we>.

<sup>149</sup> Julia McReynolds-Pérez, “No Doctors Required: Lay Activist Expertise and Pharmaceutical Abortion in Argentina,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 42, no. 2 (January 2017): 349–75, <https://doi.org/10.1086/688183>; McReynolds-Pérez, “Misoprostol for the Masses.”

International, an NGO focused on human rights, was particularly active and vocal in support of the Marea Verde. It supported the movement in their framework, stating that abortion is a “human rights imperative” that so far has been ignored by the Argentine government.<sup>150</sup>

Amnesty International went further in campaigning for the Marea Verde by organizing and advertising petitions that allowed people internationally the chance to stand in solidarity with the movement.<sup>151</sup> The NGO additionally published articles that unequivocally stated their support for the activists and specifically called for the “removal of abortion from criminal and other punitive laws and policies” in order to “stop punishing women” in favor of “universal access to safe abortion.”<sup>152</sup>

Human Rights Watch, an international NGO that conducts research and advocacy on human rights, also supported the Marea Verde and the fight for legalization. The organization publicly called on Argentina to provide legal abortion to its citizens in order to protect women’s rights. In an article that explained barriers to access to contraceptives, obstacles to the right to decide, and international human rights, Human Rights Watch recommended that Argentina enact legal change, detailing essential first steps for the President, Congress, the National Health and Environment Ministry, and other governmental bodies and organizations.<sup>153</sup>

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) additionally released statements supporting the Marea Verde and legitimizing their human

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<sup>150</sup> Belski, “The Cost of Not Approving Legal Abortion in Argentina.”

<sup>151</sup> “Stand in Solidarity with People in Argentina to Decriminalise Abortion,” Amnesty International, accessed April 16, 2021, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/take-action/argentina-decriminalise-abortion/>.

<sup>152</sup> “Argentina’s Congress Must Pass Historic Bill to Legalize Abortion,” Amnesty International USA, December 8, 2020, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/argentinas-congress-must-pass-historic-bill-to-legalize-abortion/>.

<sup>153</sup> “Decisions Denied,” Human Rights Watch, June 14, 2005, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/06/14/decisions-denied/womens-access-contraceptives-and-abortion-argentina>.



rights framework. Their public reports asserted that the right of choice and abortion is at the “very core of [the] fundamental right to equality, privacy and physical and mental integrity and is a precondition for the enjoyment of other rights” that are protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which Argentina is a signatory.<sup>154</sup> The OHCHR specifically referenced the efforts of the Marea Verde movement in their campaign for this right, applauding the “historical mobilisation of women and girls” and commending that the “ground-breaking debate has finally taken place” in Argentina.<sup>155</sup>

The involvement of these international, respected, and prominent organizations served to legitimize the Marea Verde movement and their cause. In a manner similar to the Madres, the organizations’ economic, political, and moral backing of legal abortion helped to strengthen the Marea Verde and afford the grassroots movement greater opportunity to influence political leaders and legal officials. Through the creation of international support networks, the Marea Verde, like the Madres, drew on the strength of their allies to continue to publicly protest the Argentine government from within the country.

## **V. Conclusion**

The three strategies used by the Marea Verde (acting as a boundary movement, gathering in public, and appealing to international allies) served to influence legal opinion and achieve concrete success. This conclusion details how each strategy contributed to the Marea Verde’s goal of increasing access to safer abortions and information for women as

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<sup>154</sup> “OHCHR | Argentina: UN Rights Experts Regret Senate’s Rejection of Bill to Legalise Abortion,” United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, August 10, 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23444&LangID=E>.

<sup>155</sup> “OHCHR | Argentina: UN Rights Experts Regret Senate’s Rejection of Bill to Legalise Abortion.”

well as the decriminalization of abortion by following chronologically the successes of the Marea Verde.

Abortion, related as it is to maternity and the household, is a topic rooted in the private sphere. The Marea Verde organized in support of legalizing the practice as a boundary movement that was able to occupy space in both the private and public spheres. By moving into the political arena as pro-choice activists, the women of the Marea Verde renamed abortion as a public, political issue that demanded legal attention and legal resolution. The *pañuelos verdes* and human rights frame for abortion emphasized that the democratic government, which protected human rights, needed to address this contradiction with legal change. The Marea Verde as a boundary movement thus placed abortion on the political agenda, a strategy necessary for further legal change.

This shift is reflected by the F.A.L. case of 2012, the first legal success for contemporary pro-choice advocates. Abortion had previously only been legal when the pregnant woman's life or health was at risk, or if the pregnancy was the result of a rape of a mentally deficient woman, as stipulated by article 86 of the Criminal Code.<sup>156</sup> The Supreme Court ruling was meant to clarify this second exemption, as there had been debate over whether it would apply only if a mentally disabled woman had been assaulted. In this case, the international attention gained by the introduction of abortion to the public sphere also proved influential, as Human Rights Watch and numerous other organizations filed amicus curiae briefs to officially show their support for increased legal exceptions.<sup>157</sup> The court set a new precedent by ruling that “any women, competent or disabled, who [had] been raped may

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<sup>156</sup> “Argentina: Supreme Court Decision on Abortion | Global Legal Monitor,” web page, Library of Congress Law, March 16, 2012, //www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/argentina-supreme-court-decision-on-abortion/.

<sup>157</sup> McReynolds-Pérez, “Misoprostol for the Masses.”

seek an abortion without criminal liability [or] court authorization,” a success that loosened restrictions on abortion.<sup>158</sup> Prior to this landmark decision in 2012, the penal code concerning abortion had not been revised since 1984.<sup>159</sup> This case signified the introduction of abortion to the public sphere, as outdated and long-standing laws began to change.

The Marea Verde’s strategy of gaining international attention, an approach that conformed to the boomerang model for social movements, appealed to many international organizations. Their support for the Marea Verde contributed to the movement’s goals both by helping directly to increase women’s access to safe abortions and by placing pressure on the government to effect legal change, as Human Rights Watch did during the F.A.L. case.

The misoprostol activists, due to the advancement of the larger movement and assistance from the Dutch Women on Waves organization, expanded their services available for women seeking assistance, both in the type of service offered as well as its geographic location. Lesbians and Feminists for the Decriminalization of Abortion is one such group that offers counseling and information. Since 2013, they have opened several in-person counseling centers in addition to their hotline and website services. The “*Socorristas en Red*” [First Responders Online] is a movement launched in 2014 that provides “information, [...] accompaniment,” necessary drugs “acquired through transnational activist contacts,” and telephone support throughout the procedure.<sup>160</sup> The activities of the Marea Verde served to destigmatize abortion through social decriminalization and connect women to pro-choice

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<sup>158</sup> “Argentina,” March 16, 2012.

<sup>159</sup> Bárbara Krieger, “A Brief History of Abortion in Argentina,” Monitoring COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean, January 15, 2021, <https://lawlibrariansmonitoringcovid19.com/2021/01/14/a-brief-history-of-abortion-in-argentina/>.

<sup>160</sup> Julia McReynolds-Pérez, “Argentina’s Abortion Activism in the Age of Misoprostol,” *Global Dialogue: Magazine of the International Sociological Association*, accessed April 16, 2021, <https://globaldialogue.isa-sociology.org/argentinas-abortion-activism-in-the-age-of-misoprostol/>.

networks, allowing for these organizations to more easily advertise and disseminate their information. The Women on Waves group assisted the growth of this activism from an international position by supplying the necessary drugs and promoting the services offered by the organizations. The expansion of these groups and services afforded a wider group of women the opportunity to learn about or induce a safe abortion.

Focusing more on the legislature, the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion has presented a bill proposing the legalization of abortion to the Argentine Congress every two years since 2006 in the hopes of one being included on the legislative agenda.<sup>161</sup> This never occurred until the National Congress accepted the bill onto the agenda in 2018. The Marea Verde organized a *pañuelazo* on the Plaza de Congreso for activists to hold vigil before the votes. The bill managed to pass the lower house of Congress (the Chamber of Deputies), which constituted a huge success and milestone for the Marea Verde activists, a feat that had previously seemed “unthinkable.”<sup>162</sup> The success in the House was attributed to the “power of public pressure” and the direct impact that “social mobilizations [...] have on Congress,” thus revealing the influence of the public gathering strategy.<sup>163</sup>

The bill then went to the Senate, the upper house of Congress, to be voted on. The method of public gathering employed by the Marea Verde also directly influenced the opinions of political leaders in the upper chamber, as many Senators who had previously been opposed to abortion declared before the vote that they would be supporting the bill.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Fierro and Vasco, “The Struggle for Abortion Rights in Argentina | International Socialist Review.”

<sup>162</sup> Daniel Politi, Ernesto Londoño, and Daniel Politi, “Bid to Legalize Abortion in Argentina Clears First Hurdle in Congress,” *The New York Times*, June 14, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/14/world/americas/abortion-argentina-passage.html>.

<sup>163</sup> Politi, Londoño, and Politi.

<sup>164</sup> Politi, Londoño, and Politi.

These politicians credited the “youth-led activism” of the Marea Verde with swaying their decision,<sup>165</sup> announcing that their opinions were a response to the “social demand [...] conveyed by massive collectives of women.”<sup>166</sup> Most striking is the inclusion of former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. Though she opposed abortion during her presidency, she promised to vote in favor of the 2018 bill, giving credit to the “thousands and thousands of girls who took to the streets” for changing her opinion.<sup>167</sup> From these statements, it is clear that the strategy of public gathering adopted by the Marea Verde has been highly influential in Congress and successful for the advancement of their cause.

The multinational NGOs that supported the Marea Verde focused more on increasing political pressure in favor of legal abortion instead of the direct action practiced by the Dutch Women on Waves. This pressure spiked in 2018 in support of the Marea Verde and the bill to legalize. Before the vote in the Senate, Amnesty International published a full-page ad in *The New York Times* that said: “The World is Watching.”<sup>168</sup> This advertisement went viral on social media along with a petition also organized by Amnesty International that showed solidarity with the Marea Verde and further pressured the government with slogans like “the world is looking at you: vote to decriminalize abortion.”<sup>169</sup> The Marea Verde’s tactic of gaining international attention led to international organizations publicly declaring their support for legalization, a trend that “lent a sense of accountability for the Senators on a wider global scale.”<sup>170</sup> However, the bill narrowly failed in the Senate. Despite this halt in

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<sup>165</sup> Politi, “Legal Abortion in Argentina? A Long Shot Is Suddenly Within Reach - *The New York Times*.”

<sup>166</sup> Politi, Londoño, and Politi, “Bid to Legalize Abortion in Argentina Clears First Hurdle in Congress.”

<sup>167</sup> Politi, “Legal Abortion in Argentina? A Long Shot Is Suddenly Within Reach - *The New York Times*.”

<sup>168</sup> “Assessing the ‘Green Tide.’”

<sup>169</sup> “Explainer: Why Argentina’s Vote to Decriminalize Abortion Will Be Historic,” Amnesty International, July 31, 2018, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/07/argentina-vote-to-decriminalize-abortion-explained/>.

<sup>170</sup> “Assessing the ‘Green Tide.’”

progress, its passage in the Chamber of Deputies and the support for the Senate vote is still considered a milestone and success for the Marea Verde, as it shows that their strategies were working in their struggle to effect change.

After the vote, international attention proved an important strategy once again as organizations publicized their disappointment, urging the government to do better. Human Rights Watch denounced the lack of legalization, citing that its consequence was “needless suffering, at times even death—a dreadful human cost preventable through the decriminalization of abortion.”<sup>171</sup> The OHCHR specifically addressed the government and the Senate vote, expressing their “deep regret” at the failure of the Senate to “seize [the] historical moment to demonstrate the country’s commitment towards eliminating discrimination against women in its legislation and to advance women’s [...] rights, in accordance with its international human rights obligations.”<sup>172</sup> Due to the public indictments by numerous respected organizations, the Argentine government was placed in a position reminiscent of the *junta*: in order to maintain its international reputation, change was necessary. The upper house of Congress, the Senate, was especially pressured to take different action in the future.

The change in public opinion and social decriminalization of abortion by the Marea Verde assisted in the election of current President Alberto Fernández, who promised during his campaign to support the legalization of abortion. A new bill to legalize abortion up to the 14<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy was introduced to Congress in 2020. The Marea Verde’s

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<sup>171</sup> “A Case for Legal Abortion,” Human Rights Watch, August 31, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/08/31/case-legal-abortion/human-cost-barriers-sexual-and-reproductive-rights-argentina>.

<sup>172</sup> “OHCHR | Argentina: UN Rights Experts Regret Senate’s Rejection of Bill to Legalise Abortion.”

international allies once again directed their efforts to advocating for the passage of the bill. Amnesty International, for example, reaffirmed that abortion is a “human rights imperative” and implored decision makers in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies to “realize that it is now their turn to listen to the collective call of this unstoppable green wave.”<sup>173</sup> The continuing support of international NGOs kept pressure on the Argentine Congress to change their legislation in order to remain in good standing in the international arena.

The Marea Verde’s framework and cause served to convince President Fernández of the necessity of legalization. Their display of public opinion through their gatherings demonstrated to him that the current legislation did not accurately represent the true views of Argentina – he realized that although he is Catholic, he had to “legislate for everyone” and thus take into account the opinions of the citizens.<sup>174</sup> He agreed with the Marea Verde in other public statements that the legalization of abortion would create a “better society that broadens rights for women and guarantees public health.”<sup>175</sup>

Ultimately, in December 2020 both houses of the Argentine Congress passed the bill to legalize abortions up to the 14<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy, fulfilling a primary goal of the Marea Verde.<sup>176</sup> The movement’s strategies of boundary movement activism, public gatherings, and international support networks served to gradually shift public and legal opinion. The persistent activism of the Marea Verde demonstrated to the Argentine government and the

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<sup>173</sup> “Argentina’s Congress Must Pass Historic Bill to Legalize Abortion,” Amnesty International, November 17, 2020, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/argentina-congreso-debe-aprobar-ley-historica-legalizar-aborto/>.

<sup>174</sup> Watson, “Argentina Abortion: Senate Approves Legalisation in Historic Decision - BBC News.”

<sup>175</sup> Nicolás Misculin, “‘We Did It, Sisters’: Argentina Senate Votes to Legalize Abortion,” *Reuters*, December 30, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-argentina-abortion-idUSKBN2940LG>.

<sup>176</sup> Watson, “Argentina Abortion: Senate Approves Legalisation in Historic Decision - BBC News.”

world that abortion, as a human rights and public health issue, necessitated political attention and a legal resolution.

The Madres were pioneers that set a precedent for women as activists who acted in public and in defiance of the status quo. The Marea Verde formalized these practices and systematically created strategies that would target their goals of increasing access to safe abortion and the decriminalization of abortion in the legal system. The persistence showed by the pro-choice activists in growing their network of “misoprostol activists” and services, planning and attending *pañuelazos*, creating international support networks, and taking advantage of official legal channels by repeatedly introducing bills allowed for the slow increase in access to safer abortions until the penal code was revised and abortion was no longer criminalized.



## Chapter Five: Conclusion

### I. Summary

The Marea Verde's deliberate use of political activism elements popularized by the Madres was an attempt to draw from the example and legacy of the historical campaign. The Madres' private, collective identity as mothers and their use of injustice and value-based frames brought elements of private morals into public spaces. This created a space for ethical evaluations of political policies and led to Argentina prioritizing human rights legislature. The Marea Verde, in order to take advantage of this space, adopted symbols and frames that called to mind the cause and "righteousness" of the Madres. Advocates from both movements provided their own performance of pain, calling for change so that human rights could be protected and no more Argentine citizens would have to die.

The Madres also demonstrated a new type of activism in Argentina by amplifying the voice of non-traditional actors. Their defiant activism served to create a strong presence both within the country and internationally that led to increased pressure on the *junta* for justice. In order to create this same pressure, the Marea Verde emulated the strategies of the Madres. Their visible demonstrations and protests displayed to both the Argentine and foreign governments the intensity of support for pro-choice legislation. As the Marea Verde continued to build a reputation as human rights advocates, it became more pressing for the government to address their cause, for ignoring and trivializing the movement would only damage their image both domestically and abroad.

The current legal and societal changes regarding abortion act as evidence for the efficacy of these strategies. Abortion was once prohibited both by law and custom. Societal

conventions meant that abortion was a taboo topic in Argentina; information about the procedure and support networks were difficult to find. The political sphere reflected and complemented the prevalent cultural attitudes of the time and criminalized abortion, with very few exceptions. Due to the activism of the Marea Verde, societal views evolved and abortion became more culturally accepted. The increased visibility of the issue added to the pressure on the government. The laws slowly decreased the limitations on legal abortions, allowing for greater access to the procedure. The activism of the Marea Verde culminated in the full legalization of abortion up to 14 weeks of pregnancy, making Argentina the largest Latin American country to allow the practice. Only a few other Latin American countries have allowed for abortion without restriction in early pregnancy (Uruguay, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Guyana).

## **II. Future Points of Interest**

This research, due to the contemporary nature of the Marea Verde movement and the recent historic decision in favor of legal abortion, is unfinished and inspires many additional questions. There are further implications for Argentina, Latin America, and the wider world both with regards to pro-choice ideas and social movement strategy.

The changing views regarding abortion in Argentina did not occur in a vacuum; this phenomenon influenced many other aspects of society. As pro-choice ideas spread throughout the country, opposition from pro-life groups and the Catholic Church increased as well. The involvement of the Church sparked a backlash of anti-establishment sentiments in supporters of the Marea Verde and inspired many to apostatize (to formally disaffiliate from the Catholic Church). It remains to be seen how this change in attitudes toward organized

religion will affect Argentina's future relationship with the Church and Pope Francis (an Argentine citizen).

The legalization of abortion in such a large Latin American country may increase the push for decriminalization throughout the region, where abortion remains a contentious topic. Feminist ideas and movements in neighboring countries may be bolstered by the success of the Marea Verde in Argentina. Moreover, newly forged connections between feminists from North and South America (due to international relationships established by pro-choice activists involved in the Marea Verde) may allow for a greater exchange of ideas and experiences. This new base of support may also increase the power of feminist and pro-choice movements throughout Latin America.

The ability of the Marea Verde to connect with a prior, highly significant social movement and to manipulate the cultural values and existing narrative in an effort to maximize their influence sets an important precedent for social movement strategy. It may behoove future social movements to root their movement framework within their specific national context and look to successful campaigns for inspiration in advancing their cause. The demonstrable success of the Marea Verde may signify a trend of establishing strategic connections with a location's political history for future social movements both in Argentina and the world.

The continued activism of the Marea Verde despite the Covid-19 pandemic holds additional implications for future social action. The use of the internet and social media as a vehicle of information became necessary to sustain the movement. Social media acted as an extension of the bodies and voices of the pro-choice activists and allowed them to continue to broadcast their message to the public even while they lacked the liberty to safely do so

physically on the streets. As the pandemic continues and our reliance on technology for connection increases, social movements will be affected by the relative lack of in-person activity. These connections, once formed, will continue to play an increasingly important role in future social activist movements long after the danger of the pandemic has passed. Further research could reveal the importance and effectiveness of these new methods.

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