

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Cultivating the Next of Kin: The Affinities in Argentine Women's Collective Action through the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the Ni Una Menos Movement

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The Madres de Plaza de Mayo is one of the most recognized human rights groups in the world, established in 1977 by the mothers of the *desaparecidos* during Argentina's last military dictatorship. Yet scholars doubt the Madres' ability to have formed lasting democratic citizenship models for women's collective action. In 2015, Ni Una Menos was born in Argentina as a new feminist movement to combat gender violence. This thesis will consider the two case studies of the Madres and Ni Una Menos to analyze affective ties in Argentine women's collective action. What are the long-term mobilization outcomes of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo's collective action on the political construction of Ni Una Menos? Through these case studies, this thesis will argue that the Madres conceived the Ni Una Menos movement through their unique ideology and activism. The Madres socialized motherhood and thus kinship models to form an imagined community based on their revolutionary activism. Through the Madres' kinship models, Ni Una Menos inherited their imagined community, ideological understanding of violence, and discourse. In virtue of their organizational structures, the different Madres groups passed down their body politics and working-class perspective to Ni Una Menos. The Madres have also established international human rights networks and discourse formed on their activism toward the *desaparecidos*. Ni Una Menos has taken this framework and constructed an international feminist network built off of the Madres' system and discourse abroad. With gender as an analytical tool, Ni Una Menos restructures the Madres' human rights activism to integrate women's rights and dismantle patriarchal violence.

Cultivating the Next of Kin:  
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and the Ni Una Menos Movement

By

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## **Dedication**

*Para mis papás, los amo hasta el cielo de la pileta.*

*Y para mi patria, al gran pueblo argentino salud.*

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What would this thesis be without the extraordinary women in my life? Thank you to my roommates and best friends for showing me what it means to exemplify the strength of womanhood. To my sister for epitomizing the female activist. To my grandmother for teaching me how to enjoy life's pleasures. To my cousin Delfi for bridging the gap between Argentina and me. To my aunt and godmother Gail for responding to my Whatsapp messages with incredible speed. To Brooke Lennox for answering my incessant questions and for making this whole process a little less lonely. And to the women of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Ni Una Menos for defining what it means to be a woman and an activist in Argentina.

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## **Discussion on Translations**

This thesis utilizes sources in standard Spanish, as well as in Rioplatense Spanish, the Argentine dialect. Being an Argentine native, I was able to translate all sources and videos in both dialects applying my Spanish fluency and seventeen years of studying the language in academic settings. To avoid any ambiguity, I consulted the online database Linguee that utilizes bilingual dictionaries and online translations to interpret terms and phrases.

## Chapter One: Introduction

### I. Background and Introduction

This thesis will draw connections between one of the most revolutionary women's groups that formed during the last military dictatorship in Argentina, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, and the current feminist movement Ni Una Menos. Historically, Argentine women's collective action has been marked by its legitimization of inequality and hierarchy, thwarting many of its own goals toward women and human rights. Yet its original focus of politicizing social rights and the role of women in civil society has persisted throughout Argentina's history.

In South America, Argentine women were pioneers in establishing liberal feminist organizations, and in 1910, Buenos Aires hosted the First International Women's Congress (Marino 2019: 16). Many of the women who were leading these conferences were not new actors in civil society; these feminists had extensive ties to socialist networks throughout Latin America (Marino 2019: 134). Pan-American feminism and *feminismo americano* had as a basis a demand "for women's individual rights under the law" (Marino 2019: 4). Yet it also had a focus on "economic and social rights," including that of "equal pay for equal work" and the "extension of labor legislation to rural and domestic workers" (Marino 2019: 4). The introduction of Argentine feminism into the world sphere constituted a "broad definition of women's and human rights" that consisted of "social and economic as well as political and civil rights for all, regardless of race, class, or sex" (Marino 2019: 169).

Argentine feminists also proved vital in the 1930s regarding the antifascist response worldwide. Groups such as the Federación Argentina de Mujeres por la Paz advocated for "peace, antifascism, and feminism" (Marino 2019: 140). Their work eventually spread throughout Latin America, and in December 1936 the Confederación Continental de Mujeres for

la Paz was created in Buenos Aires as a confederation of Latin American women united under those common goals (Marino 2019: 142).

Many feminist leaders at the time saw a strong connection between “women’s affective relationships” and “international peace” (Marino 2019: 20). Yet this feminist work did not go without controversy: some Argentine feminist leaders were themselves eugenicists (Marino 2019: 22). Beliefs of “racial and cultural superiority” were integral to the beginnings of Pan-American feminism (Marino 2019: 22). Although Pan-American feminism and thus Argentine feminism began with idealized goals of social, political, and economic rights for all, it created further divisions based on race and class within the Latin American feminist movement. The racial and cultural divisions developed at the start of Argentine feminism did and will continue to play a role in women’s collective action and its accessibility throughout the country’s history.

Even with the recognition of Argentine feminists throughout the region, women’s suffrage in Argentina was not achieved through a bottom-up initiative. Instead, the populist presidency of Juan Domingo Perón gave women the right to vote by presidential decree in 1947 (Hammond 2004: 3). While women’s suffrage throughout Latin America was seen as a response to the 1947 UN Charter (Marino 2019: 230), in Argentina it was also tied to the Peronist Party agenda. Eva Perón, Perón’s wife, was crucial for women gaining the right to vote (Taylor 1997: 47). As Perón granted political rights to women by presidential decree, Eva organized the Peronist Feminine Party (Taylor 1997: 47). The Peronist Feminine Party was not a feminist organization; rather, much like the presidential decree, it was created to guarantee women’s loyalty to Perón (Hammond 2004: 337).

Although she brought women into Argentine politics, Eva “framed” women’s rights “strictly within the confines of patriarchy” (Taylor 1997: 47). While she “projected the

traditional image of motherhood” in politics, she also “helped perpetuate the authoritarian state while they wielded power” (Bouvard 1994: 187). In Argentine politics, women’s rights were molded into patriarchal Peronist ideals. Instead of the earlier feminists’ call for women and human rights, women’s rights were utilized as a political and patriarchal tool. Because women were given the right to vote by presidential decree, and not by the previous work of Argentine feminists, their political role was precarious. Argentine women’s road to politics was marked by its bureaucratization into the populist state.

By 1955, the Peronist Feminine Party made up one-third of the Peronist delegation in Congress (Hammond 2004: 378). Yet the first female president did not come to power until 1974. When Perón died during his second presidency, his second wife Isabelita, the Vice President, became the head of state (Taylor 1997: 54). Her presidency, however, was short-lived. Divisions in the country between right and left-wing *peronistas* fomented massive civil unrest (Taylor 1997: 54). In 1976, the Argentine military executed a *coup-d'état* that overthrew Isabelita’s government and established the military junta that would rule the country from 1976 to 1983 (Feijoó and Nari 1994: 111). As a result of the military junta’s policy of state terrorism, a number of women’s groups were formed to combat the violence Argentines were experiencing (Feijoó and Nari 1994: 112).

Argentina is no stranger to women’s collective action. In its beginnings, Argentine feminism directed its attention beyond women’s suffrage; women’s democratic citizenship was understood around the concepts of political, social, and economic rights. Yet women’s suffrage became a political tool to incorporate women into the populist and bureaucratic government of Juan Domingo Perón, suppressing many of the earlier Argentine feminists work toward women’s

rights. The lack of paths to democratic citizenship for women was exacerbated when, in 1973, the Argentine military junta took over the government and abolished civil society.

This thesis will highlight the expanding political process and affective ties of Argentine women's collective action through two case studies. Specifically, what are the long-term mobilization outcomes of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo's collective action on the political construction of Ni Una Menos? With this question in mind, I will argue that the Madres developed a specific form of kinship ideology and collective action that birthed the Ni Una Menos movement. Expanding the Madres' struggle, Ni Una Menos re-conceptualizes the ideology and activism of the Madres to vitalize its feminist revolution through a gendered lens in a contemporary, global Argentina.

In this chapter, I will first introduce the two case studies, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Ni Una Menos. Then, I will consider previous literature on both Madres groups and the Ni Una Menos movement, aiming attention at the lack of scholarship regarding the Madres' ability to conceive new and broad feminist movements. I will also delineate the methodology utilized for this research. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by outlining the primary arguments of this thesis in relation to my research question.

### *The Madres de Plaza de Mayo*

On March 24, 1976, the Argentine military enacted a coup that outlawed civil society under the banner of a "process of national reorganization" (Taylor 1997: 59-60). The process of national reorganization was an attack toward the popular sectors: "social services," a pertinent component of previous administrations, were "drastically curtailed" (Feijoó and Nari 1994: 111). This curtailment included the termination of health services and the cutback of public education (Feijoó and Nari 1994: 111).

Concealed by a motto of law and order, the military “rapidly implemented a set of neoliberal economic policies and imposed a repressive social order,” which quickly turned into a “policy of state terrorism” (Feijoó and Nari 1994: 111). As the junta consolidated its power, violence in all forms took over Argentina and infiltrated societal life. The military formed “*grupos de tareas*,” or “task forces” with the “responsibility to capture and interrogate members of suspect organizations, their sympathizers, associates, and anyone else who might oppose the government” (Bouvard 1994: 23).

These task forces operated under vague pretenses; while the junta claimed to protect a “Western civilization,” its “definition of the enemy was ominously and deliberately loose” (Bouvard 1994: 23). The “subversion” narrative was a mask for “any and all opposition to the armed forces,” and created a subversive antagonist that was “transgressive, hidden, dangerous, [and] dirty” (Taylor 1997: 67). The ambiguous enemy gave the military the power to disappear Argentine citizens that did not conform to its policies. As it issued a sense of uniformity, “thousands of people were dragged from their homes, their places of work, from the streets” by these task forces “in fleets of unmarked cars” (Bouvard 1994: 24). After being taken to detention centers, they were tortured, and many were later disappeared with no trace left of their existence (Bouvard 1994: 28-29).

This kind of violence was sustained given the complicity of other institutions that allowed and assisted in the junta’s reign. The Catholic Church hailed the military coup, and Catholic officials obtained positions in the new government (Bouvard 1994: 52). Furthermore, the clergy cooperated in the disappearances from their “close connection to the government” to its “assistance during the tortures in the detention centers” (Bouvard 1994: 53). This violence was also the junta’s method to ensure the enforcement of neoliberal policies, with the backing of

neoliberal businesses. Executives from the Ford Motor Company were convicted of assisting in the torture and disappearances of workers, “[benefitting] economically” for disappearing individuals who had ties to unions (Politi 2018). Business leaders and directors were directly involved in the disappearances of Argentine laborers (Bohoslavsky 2016: 220). Through the cooperation and assistance of the Catholic Church and neoliberal institutions, the military junta disappeared thousands in a seven-year span.

Under the policy of state terrorism, violence took on a gendered perspective. Task forces abducted pregnant women, and after they were disappeared their children were given away to military officials and high-profile businessmen (Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared). In the process of national reorganization, women were considered “‘naturally’ responsible for the reproductive role, and thus responsible in the last instance for family welfare” (Feijoó and Nari 1994: 111). According to the military junta, women were accountable for maintaining the welfare of the family and for populating a right-wing society. In other words, if their children were disappeared, the women were to blame. Even so, women were a part of the “least-favored economic class and thus could not compete for good jobs or work for decent wages” (Feijoó and Nari 1994: 111). The class aspect of this violence put women in a vulnerable position, and with no civil society present, their paths to justice against the junta were obsolete.

Moreover, the military junta deconstructed the line between private and public spaces in Argentine society. The home, a private space, became a public one once it was “[raided]” and children were kidnapped “in the dead of night” (Taylor 1997: 198). This disruption of the family and home coincided with the military’s patriarchal narrative exploiting women for their responsibility of the home. Family members were forced to search for their loved ones at “police stations, hospitals, and military garrisons only to be told that there were no records... and that

they would have to direct their efforts elsewhere” (Bouvard 1994: 27). Mothers began to recognize familiar faces at these institutions, and soon they noticed a pattern (Bouvard 1994: 68).

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo were one of the first groups to demand truth and justice against the repressive and violent military regime that reigned in Argentina from 1976 to 1983. These women took to the Plaza de Mayo in 1977 and demanded the return of the *desaparecidos*, their children who had disappeared at the hands of the dictatorship (Bouvard 1994: 69).

As the junta “blurred private-public distinctions,” the Madres utilized this approach, claiming their “maternal responsibilities... took them to the Plaza in search of their children” (Taylor 1997: 198). They recruited other mothers and reached out to national institutions for information, including the President (Bouvard 1994: 69). First, the Madres mobilized and marched on the Plaza; later, they established themselves as an organization. The Madres adopted “a shawl” or a “*mantilla*,” a diaper to wear on their heads to “make [them] feel closer to [their] children” (Bouvard 1994: 74). These white *pañuelos*, scarves, proved emblematic: they “symbolized peace, life, and maternal ties... in the public arena” against military repression (Bouvard 1994: 75). The junta attempted to discredit them by calling them “*las locas*,” or the crazy women (Bouvard 2010: 3), thus equating them with emotional hysteria rather than referring to them as political activists.

The Madres registered as an official organization in August 1979 with international connections throughout Europe that bolstered their recognition (Bouvard 2010: 2). In 1980, they were even nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for their work (Bouvard 2010: 3), exemplifying the impact the group has had on international human rights discourse. As the junta lost power in 1983, “instead of being ignored or vilified by the press,” the Madres’ actions were “received” by



“sympathetic and wide coverage” (Bouvard 1994: 126). The Madres became the leading voice for truth and justice during the process of democratization in Argentina.

Their struggle did not end once the democratically elected government of Raúl Alfonsín came to power. With new, democratic pathways to justice, the mothers called on the government to bring the responsible parties to trial (Romanin 2014: 12). Their demands were based on the belief that the few military officials held accountable did not encompass the reality of the military’s systematic and wide-spread oppression. To move on from the dictatorship, Alfonsín’s government passed the “*Punto Final*” or the Full Stop Law (Romanin 2014: 12) that halted the trials against the responsible military officials. The Madres also publicly denounced CONADEP (Redacción Perfil 2011), or the Argentine National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, in the belief that a truth commission was not enough to heal their wounds. The Madres did not just want the truth; they needed justice to take a physical and palpable form in their eyes for society to reconcile this trauma.

As they marched demanding “*Juicio a las Juntas Militares*” (Romanin 2014: 12), or “Trials for the Military Junta,” their cries were overpowered by the following government of Carlos Menem. In 1989, Menem’s government pardoned the officials that were excluded from the *Punto Final* Law. The Madres’ fight against the junta represented confrontation; their battle against these new governments was a continuation of that struggle. Officials publicly criticized them for their inability to mend their wounds, and the violent threats the Madres received could be traced back to law enforcement agencies (Bouvard 2010: 3). These officials and agencies were the governing bodies that were built to protect them; the government’s willingness to endanger the Madres undermined the new democracy’s ability to protect its citizens.

The Madres did not hold the leading voice of truth and justice without controversy: in 1986, the group split into different factions (Bosco 2004: 383), each with their own perspective for the future of the *desaparecidos* and the nation. On one side is the Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora; on the other is the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo. This schism began as an organizational issue. The Asociación was becoming more hierarchical and politically radical, and the disillusioned women who left the organization formed the Línea Fundadora (Bosco 2004: 383).

While they differ in their structure and vision for the future of the nation, together they continue to march on the Plaza every Thursday with their emblematic *pañuelos* demanding truth and justice (Bosco 2004: 383). Despite their differences, the root of their activism as mothers of the *desaparecidos* continues to tie these groups together at the Plaza. I will consider the ideology and activism of both Madres organizations. Throughout the years that they have been active, whether together or separate, each group created their own form of kinship politics, imagined communities, and embodied activism that gave rise to Ni Una Menos. This thesis will distinguish between the Madres organizations when comparing and discussing them in relation to Ni Una Menos, demonstrating how the combination of both of their ideologies and types of activism produced the new movement.

### *Ni Una Menos*

In 1976, the term “femicide” was officially defined by feminist Diana Russell as “the assassination of a woman for the fact that she is a woman” (Cabral and Acacio 2016: 173), which “eliminated the ambiguity of asexual terms like homicide and assassination” (Salvatierra 2007: 2). The definition of the concept was essential; it assured that the crime of femicide would not be reduced to homicide and would be placed within a patriarchal framework.

In 2004, the anthropologist and feminist Marcela Lagarde coined the term “feminicide” (Cabral and Acacio 2016: 173). This new term implies a responsibility of the state, in which “feminicide implies a state that hides, participates, or is connected with networks that perpetrate crimes against women” (Cabral and Acacio 2016: 173). Lagarde believes that utilizing this term in Latin America highlights the “governmental collusion” in relation to “the systematic deaths of women” in the region (Cabral and Acacio 2016: 173). For the purpose of this thesis, I will be utilizing “femicide,” as this is the term used by Ni Una Menos. Yet it is important to emphasize the responsibility or lack thereof of Latin American states when discussing Ni Una Menos’ work.

The international discussion on femicide in the 1980s coincided with Argentine democratization when human rights became a part of the national agenda (Cabral and Acacio 2016: 174-175). The growth of feminism and the opening of civil society during this time allowed for the creation of new laws and state agencies dedicated to putting an end to this violence (Cabral and Acacio 2016: 175). Yet these new developments focused primarily on family settings (Cabral and Acacio 2016: 175), thus obscuring other forms of gender violence outside of the home.

Because of the work of feminists and women’s organizations, in 2009, the Kirchner administration created a national law dedicated to “preventing, sanctioning, and eradicating violence against women” (Cabral and Acacio 2016: 175). This language encompassed gender violence outside of the home as well, assuring that it is not just seen as a domestic violence issue. Furthermore, in 2012, a national law explicitly incorporated femicide into the section of the Criminal Code that addresses homicide (Article 80) (Cabral and Acacio 2016: 175). The incorporation of femicide to the Criminal Code ensured that femicide could not be placed in the

category of “violent emotion” (Cabral and Acacio 2016: 175), which in the past often minimized penalties for such crimes.

While the concept of violence against women had gained traction in the public agenda before Ni Una Menos, femicide was and is still prevalent in Argentina. In the media, these crimes are seen as “excessive, singular, and isolated” events that are only reported in police-related news (Cabral and Acacio 2016: 176). They are labeled as “crimes of passion” (Cabral and Acacio 2016: 176), thus justifying the perpetrator’s actions. This kind of framing also refuses to place the concept of femicide in relation to the larger, patriarchal structures that allow and produce violence against women in Latin America. The 2004 and 2012 laws, although important, were “insufficient” to “confront the problem in all its complexity” (Cabral and Acacio 2016: 177). Fourteen of the twenty-five countries with the highest femicide rates are located in Latin America (“Se lanzó la Iniciativa Spotlight, para la eliminación de la violencia contra mujeres y niñas”). In Argentina, “every thirty hours, a woman is assassinated... for the sole fact that she is a woman” (Annunziata et al. 2016: 49).

The movement Ni Una Menos, or Not One [Woman] Less, emerged in 2015 as a response to the media attention on femicide in Argentina. It started with a simple hashtag: *#NiUnaMenos*, the slogan that inspired these events, became a massive social movement demanding justice in the face of gender violence throughout the country, Latin America, and the world. After the death of a fourteen-year-old girl named Chiara Páez, women took to social media (Rovetto 2015: 18). With the words “*NOS ESTÁN MATANDO*” (THEY ARE KILLING US) blasted in a tweet, Marcela Ojeda, a respected journalist, opened an online conversation between herself and other journalists in the public eye (Annunziata et al. 2016: 48).

The hashtag went viral, and thus commenced the mobilization of the movement. On June 3, 2015, in front of the Congreso Nacional in Buenos Aires between 150,000 and 200,000 people lined up to protest; nation-wide, the estimated number was around 1,000,000 protestors (Annunziata et al. 2016: 47). This march was followed by the publication of a list of five demands: for the government to fund resources and national programs, to guarantee victims access to the justice system, to develop an official register of femicide, to guarantee and implement comprehensive sex education, and to guarantee the protection of victims (Annunziata et al. 2016: 53). The marches brought together unions, feminist organizations, and government officials in the name of Ni Una Menos (Annunziata et al. 2016: 56). These marches are now replicated every year, along with other mobilizations such as strikes that demand action against gender violence in all its forms (“Ni Una Menos”).

One of the founders of Ni Una Menos is Marta Dillon, a journalist and the daughter of the *desaparecida* Marta Taboada (Dillon and Ludueña 2018). Apart from her work for Ni Una Menos, she is a member of the group H.I.J.O.S, or Children for Identity and Justice Against Forgetting and Silence, an organization made up of the *desaparecidos*’ children (Murguía 2013). Marta was a witness to the kidnapping of her militant mother and testified on her disappearance in February 2018 (Dillon and Ludueña 2018).

For Marta Dillon, the struggles of being a daughter of a *desaparecida* and a militant feminist for Ni Una Menos are one and the same. She claims that although state-sponsored terrorism has ended, a lot of its “ideas and methods of discipline have remained” intact in Argentina (Dillon and Ludueña 2018). Marta asserts that “there are no human rights without feminism” (Dillon and Ludueña 2018), and thus justifies her work in human rights with her militant feminism in Ni Una Menos.

As a movement beginning online with multiple voices behind its slogan, Ni Una Menos became broad enough to encompass other gender issues in Argentina. It calls for the legalization of abortion, the expansion of childcare, and public and private investment in employment opportunities for Argentine women (Durano 2020). Ni Una Menos also extends its support for other women's movements internationally (“Territorio: nuestro cuerpo, nuestro espíritu’ Declaración en apoyo y solaridad con las comunidades de la Amazonía”). Through its Twitter page and manifestos, Ni Una Menos broadcasts its demands and calls for action from governments and activists. The expansive nature of this movement, from online to offline, allowed it to broaden its demands and mobilize people to pressure governments and society to work against gender violence.

## **II. Literature Review**

This section will focus on the scholarly literature on the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Ni Una Menos. Ni Una Menos is a new phenomenon spreading throughout Latin America; therefore, scholarship on the movement is limited. There are few studies of Ni Una Menos’ beginnings and its impact on the socio-political environment in relation to its antecedents. My research will concentrate on the relationship between these two movements by analyzing how the Madres’ activism inspired the formation of Ni Una Menos and influenced its development within the realm of women’s collective action in Argentina.

### *Kinship Politics*

Gandsman argues that because of the crucial role that forensic anthropology played in the transition to democracy, there has been an emphasis on Argentine human rights organizations that arose during the dictatorship to privilege kinship and biology (Gandsman 2012: 205). The

prioritization of kinship holds true for the Madres; their entrance into political life and organization was because they were the mothers of the *desaparecidos*. Yet this kinship argument is not extended to other movements that have grown after the post-dictatorship rise of human rights organizations. This thesis will look at how the kinship politics legitimized after the dictatorship were and are socialized, and thus were utilized to expand the human rights movement to women's rights, producing and including Ni Una Menos into this kinship.

The first exclusive works on the Madres also focused on a kinship approach: the theme of maternalism. Their activism has been recognized as “maternal activism,” in which their social action is derived from their experiences as mothers to their disappeared children (Burchianti 2004: 14). In essence, their statuses as political actors were borne out of their role and duty as mothers. This transformation is analyzed as a “[socialized] maternity”; their fight includes that of their disappeared children, and also the marginalized peoples fighting for their rights in the present (Bouvard 1994: 181).

Taylor argues that, as activists, the Madres claim that motherhood is “a social, not biological construct” (Taylor 1997: 206). Kinship, then, is not solely based on biology; rather, the Madres demonstrated how it can be expanded to influence new forms of civic participation. Scholars have yet to utilize the concept of socialized maternity within kinship politics and activism: the Madres' socialized maternity has not been studied outside of its own organization. This thesis will have as a focus the Madres' ability to use their socialized maternity to birth Ni Una Menos, a new and expansive feminist movement.

Bouvard furthers the argument of socialized maternity by stating that it is a “revolutionized maternity,” meaning that the Madres intend to revolutionize the political system to mirror their maternal values (Bouvard 1994: 62). These maternal values rest on their identity

as mothers and political actors, in which their responsibility as mothers demanded that they become politicized. Bouvard, however, does not address the larger network of collective action that the Madres work within when discussing their revolution. This thesis will consider the Madres' revolutionary ideals in relation to their collective, imagined community, in which Ni Una Menos works to dismantle patriarchal systems of violence.

This form of kinship activism has been criticized by scholars. Gandsman contends that because of kinship politics these human rights organizations, including the Madres, are seen as apolitical and not "citizenship activism" models (Gandsman 2012: 194). This thesis will argue that the Madres' activism is political and has created a democratic citizenship model for Ni Una Menos that widens the struggle for human rights. Taylor asserts that "the Madres grassroots activism movement lacked any lasting organizational structure" because "it did little to stop international aid to the armed forces" of Argentina during the dictatorship (Taylor 1997: 201). However, it has yet to be studied in scholarship if and how other movements utilized their kinship structure to continue the Madres' struggle. This thesis will argue that while the Madres' organization may not last, their use of kinship politics conceived organizational structures in collective action that have been reproduced in Ni Una Menos.

Bosco asserts that the Madres' affective bonds between each other were essential for the "emergence, sustainability, and cohesion" (Bosco 2006: 343) of the group across all of Argentina. These affective bonds are at the root of their activism, between each other and the *desaparecidos*. Bosco argues that the politicization of these emotional bonds is the underlying factor in their unity and imagined community (Bosco 2006: 361). Yet the concept of affective bonds has only been studied within the confines of the Madres organization. Their use of affective bonds within their imagined community and other movements has not been analyzed.



This thesis will have as a focus the Madres' politicization of emotion, through which they contributed to Ni Una Menos' understanding of its imagined community and kinship politics.

Romanin argues that the Madres also built their imagined community around their perception of structural and neoliberal violence (Romanin 2014: 14). Ni Una Menos functions within this dynamic: Annunziata et al. recognize Ni Una Menos' understanding of the rise of neoliberalism and the exploitation of women (Annunziata et al. 2016: 56). While scholars have discussed each group's imagined communities, they have yet to link the groups into a larger, leftist collective identity. I will analyze both of the movements' links to this identity and their imagined communities within the kinship structure, in which Ni Una Menos inherited the Madres' understanding of structural violence to combat patriarchal violence.

### *Feminism*

Taylor asserts that the Madres are not feminists, "if by feminism one refers to the politicization of the female's subordinate status" (Taylor 1997: 192). She argues that the Madres did not "[alter] the politics of the home," or repudiate concepts like the "gendered division of labor" (Taylor 1997: 192). Furthermore, Bouvard outlines the Madres' view of feminist organizations as ones that "[represent] privileged circles" (Bouvard 1994: 191). The Madres themselves reject the feminist label, as they see feminism as serving upper-class politics.

Bouvard makes a similar argument to Taylor, contending that the Madres "support women's rights" yet are not interested in "promoting change that would unravel women from their maternal role" (Bouvard 1994: 191). The Madres' introduction to political activism was developed around their role as mothers; thus, they do not actively intend to disassemble or transform gender roles. The feminism analyses of the Madres do not address how feminist movements utilized the Madres' activism to advance their own agendas.

Howe details the Madres' experience as a new organization in relation to Latin American feminism. Because of the dictatorship's crackdown on civil society, Argentina was "largely devoid of any feminist network" (Howe 2006: 44) when the Madres formed their organization. At the same time, second-wave feminist organizations were present in "the continent as a whole" and there was a "degree of precedent for women's movements in the country itself" (Howe 2006: 44). As a movement made up strictly of women, of mothers, the Madres were placed into the feminist conversation after the fall of the dictatorship, not by their own will but by larger feminist debates during democratization. Howe affirms that, although the Madres' main goals were not feminist, they "[promoted] human rights, and thereby women's rights that are frequently tied up with them" (Howe 2006: 49). For the purpose of this thesis, I will not attempt to define the Madres' feminism. Rather, I will be looking at how their activism conceived a new feminist movement in Ni Una Menos, one that utilizes gender to deconstruct the systems of violence that the Madres work against.

Although scholars criticized the Madres for taking on a maternal approach and reinforcing traditional ideas of motherhood (Taylor 1997: 192, Feijoó and Nari 1994: 113), they do not dispute the Madres' work for grassroots women's organizations. Taylor concedes that the "spectacle" the Madres made through their "resistant bodies... prompted feminists... to rethink the seemingly unbridgeable schism between women's grassroots and feminist movements" (Taylor 1997: 207). Moreover, Feijoó and Nari argue that although the Madres did not challenge traditional patriarchal roles, they "produced a transformation of the traditional feminine self-awareness and its political role" (Feijoó and Nari 1994: 113).

Their use of "resistant bodies," or body politics, and their "transformation" of traditional roles provoked feminists and feminist movements to see the Madres as examples of women's

grassroots work. However, scholars have not analyzed how the Madres' activism inspired and produced feminist movements like Ni Una Menos. This thesis will argue that the Madres' body politics and their subversion of tradition generated Ni Una Menos, connecting women's grassroots and feminist movements by producing a feminist movement that utilizes the Madres as precedent.

### *Activism*

Regarding the Madres' activism, Bosco describes the differences in organizational style between the Madres groups and claims that these differences played a critical role in their schism (Bosco 2004: 383-384). Yet these organizational styles, focused on democracy and kinship, have only been studied to explain the divergence between the groups. Annunziata et al. outlined Ni Una Menos' organizational style as a collective, with only a few leaders who coordinate the movement's activities (Annunziata et al. 2016: 48). Academics have not studied how the Madres' organizational styles contributed to the rise and organization of new movements. I will argue that the Madres' insistence on democratic values within their activism influenced and produced Ni Una Menos and its collectivity.

Scholars have maintained that the Madres' maternal activism encapsulates embodied politics, a concept that implies that the body is a space in which activism is demonstrated. Bosco cites the differences between the Línea Fundadora's and the Asociación's embodiment of politics, in which the former focuses on commemoration while the latter utilizes commemoration and body politics to expand its socialized maternity (Bosco 2004: 392). Academics have not studied how Ni Una Menos employs the body and commemoration into the movement's activism. The extension of the socialized maternity theory to other movements in the kinship structure, in which embodied politics takes a critical role, has also yet to be researched. I will

compare each of the Madres group's use of body politics in relation to Ni Una Menos' embodiment of activism. Through analyses of body politics, I will demonstrate how Ni Una Menos developed its form of militancy by combining the practices of both Madres organizations.

One concept that is reiterated in scholarship in regard to the Madres and Ni Una Menos is the importance of *poner el cuerpo*, placing one's body on the front lines of the movement. Gandsman claims that for the Madres, *poner el cuerpo* "refers to women's embodied subjectivities as a source of political resistance" (Gandsman 2012: 209). While this implies that other women can replicate this tactic for political resistance, Gandsman does not expand the concept to other movements. For Ni Una Menos, Annunziata et al. argue that *poner el cuerpo* was critical for the movement's mobilization to move from an online to offline space (Annunziata et al. 2016: 65). Scholarship has not analyzed the connection between the Madres' and Ni Una Menos' use of this tactic. This thesis will examine the relationship between the groups' activism and will argue that Ni Una Menos inherited the Madres' use of body politics to expose and oppose patriarchal violence.

Scholarship has also independently discussed the Madres' and Ni Una Menos' relationship with other leftist organizations. Bouvard focuses on the Madres' strained relationship with unions and workers (Bouvard 1994: 51), while Castro speaks to the collectives, unions, and social organizations that joined and have become a part of Ni Una Menos mobilizations (Castro 2018: 46). These relationships with leftist groups have not been analyzed in relation to each other and within a larger, leftist collective identity. This thesis will consider these ties and will claim that the Madres' relationship and activism with working-class identities led Ni Una Menos to utilize the Madres' tactics to advance its cause for working women.

Bouvard and Taylor chronicled the relationships the Madres made with international journalists (Bouvard 1994: 82) and support groups (Bouvard 1994: 86, Taylor 1997: 187). However, these scholars focused exclusively on the protection and funding that these international groups provide the Madres. Similarly, scholars have touched on Ni Una Menos' international recognition by journalists (Annunziata et al. 2016: 49), and other women's movements around the world (Castro 2018: 47-48), but they have not researched or analyzed these relationships in depth. I will discuss the Madres' and Ni Una Menos' relationships abroad to demonstrate how the Madres' international activism developed a network that has been adopted by Ni Una Menos and reformulated to create an international feminist network.

All of these groups also inspired other movements abroad. Scholarship has recognized a large number of Madres groups across Latin America during democratization (Bouvard 1994: 237-238, Howe 2006: 47). In Ni Una Menos' case, academics have examined other Ni Una Menos movements that have occurred around the globe, taking Argentina's example and making the movement their own (Annunziata et al. 2016: 60, Castro 2018: 21). Yet scholars have not analyzed these cases within the larger, international discourse of women's activism. This thesis will argue that the Madres' international human rights discourse created a foundation for and legitimized Ni Una Menos' work with international feminist discourse.

### **III. Methodology**

I argue that Ni Una Menos appropriated and redefined the Madres' movement and its discourse to expand the Madres' broad human rights message to explicitly incorporate women's rights. My argument is based on an analysis of kinship and genealogy: the Madres' ability to

collectivize maternity to give birth to Ni Una Menos. I will analyze the Madres' influence and its relation to that of Ni Una Menos through their activism domestically and internationally.

The time frame for this research will start at the beginning of the Madres movement in 1977, during the military dictatorship, when they developed their organizational structure in opposition to the state. I will also examine their work during the transitional period to democracy and the governments thereafter. Regarding Ni Una Menos, my timeline begins at the movement's inception in 2015. As the movement is recent, it is still forming its collective identity and producing knowledge, thus, the timeframe for Ni Una Menos will extend into 2019. This will encompass its beginnings under the leftist government of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, and the later progression under the neoliberal government of Mauricio Macri.

To develop my argument, I will be drawing from previous scholarship regarding the Madres to establish their use of kinship politics. I will also be referencing interviews conducted by scholars who have studied the Madres extensively. Previous scholarship has not developed the kinship argument for new movements; therefore, I will be looking at the Madres' discourse through their speeches, letters, and videos that they have produced. Combined with the literature, these primary sources will allow me to explore the Madres' understanding of the socialized maternity concept and kinship in relation to their imagined community and production of movements. Because Ni Una Menos is a new movement, there is limited literature on its relationship with older movements. This thesis will utilize Ni Una Menos' published manifestos<sup>1</sup> alongside interviews and literature by scholars to demonstrate its place in the Madres' imagined community, and also its perception of the kinship politics between the movements.

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<sup>1</sup> Nearing the end of my research, Ni Una Menos' website, niunamenos.org.ar, shut down indefinitely. For the purpose of this thesis, I utilized the Internet Archive's last updated version of the movement's page from December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019 to access the website ("Ni Una Menos").

I will also be looking at the Madres' and Ni Una Menos' development of their activism at home and abroad. This thesis will look at previous literature of all the movements' activism domestically and internationally to historically contextualize their actions.

On the domestic front, this thesis will draw upon the movement's discourse, structure, and relationships with other organizations from Ni Una Menos' manifestos and website, and the Madres' speeches, interviews, and letters. I will utilize photographs from newspaper articles regarding the Madres and photographs from Ni Una Menos' protests to analyze their use of body politics in their activism. With these primary sources and the support of background information from previous scholarship, I will argue that through action and discourse Ni Una Menos inherited the Madres' action and activist network.

On an international scale, I will draw from journalists' accounts of the Madres during the dictatorship, and the Madres' speeches to analyze their relationship with international journalists, support groups, and other regional Madres organizations. I will also look at Ni Una Menos' Twitter page, manifestos, and international protests to study the movement's shift from an online to offline space throughout the world, and its relationship with other international feminist movements. I will argue that through these relationships abroad, the Madres were able to legitimize their international human rights network and discourse, in a way that could be diversified by Ni Una Menos to expand the concept to include gender rights worldwide.

#### **IV. Summary of Chapters**

This thesis will first look at the ideological inheritance and kinship networks in which the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Ni Una Menos perceive themselves. Then, it will focus on the actions that each group has taken on a domestic scale, in relation to their organizational

structures, body politics, and working-class activism. Finally, this thesis will analyze the activism abroad of the Madres and Ni Una Menos, considering their creation of international networks and discourse.

Chapter two will first discuss the Madres' maternal activism and socialized maternity, in which they politicized kinship networks. The chapter will argue that the Madres created a shared space of revolution dedicated to social rights to combat and dismantle the violent system that disappeared their children and that is still present in Argentine society. It will discuss how through these socialized kinship networks, Ni Una Menos was birthed into the Madres' imagined community that politicizes affective ties between members and movements.

Then, this chapter will consider Ni Una Menos' inheritance of the Madres' symbols, conforming these traits to fit its agenda against gender violence. It will then demonstrate how, within this shared imagined community, Ni Una Menos also inherited the Madres' ideological understanding of violence. The movement has taken inheritance a step further by creating a direct lineage with the *desaparecidas*, or the women that were disappeared. This chapter will argue that Ni Una Menos sees a linear relationship between the patriarchal violence instilled during the dictatorship, and the violence women are experiencing in present-day Argentina.

The following chapter will look at the different organizational structures of the three organizations. It will discuss the schism of the Madres in the 1980s regarding their diverging views on democratic values, that contribute to the Línea Fundadora's and the Asociación's differing organizational structures. This chapter will consider the Línea Fundadora's democratic, horizontal structure's ability to inspire Ni Una Menos' horizontal framework. It will also consider the Asociación's use of an independent, vertical, and familial structure to pass on and inspire its activism to grassroots and younger activists: to first mobilize, and then organize. Ni



Una Menos utilizes this tactic of mobilizing and then organizing with a horizontal, collective approach. The movement's beginnings and philosophy necessitate horizontalism, thus the movement's production of knowledge comes from victims and activists, allowing it to incorporate new claims of gender violence into its movement.

Chapter three will relate how these organizational structures contributed to the actions taken by each group in Argentina. It will examine the groups' body politics by first analyzing the commemoration and embodied actions taken by the different Madres groups. It will then consider Ni Una Menos' embodied politics in relation to the Madres' use of the practice. Through the tactic of *poner el cuerpo*, all three organizations emphasized the need for life and collectivity and utilize their bodies as a powerful tool against repression. Ni Una Menos, like the Madres, commemorates and acts on its politics. This chapter will argue that Ni Una Menos activists, by way of their bodies, connect the violence experienced by the *desaparecidas* as persistent patriarchal violence that can be refuted by their use of their own autonomy.

This chapter will also look at the Asociación's and Ni Una Menos' working-class perspectives, as the Línea Fundadora does not utilize this position to advance its activism. I will consider the Asociación's embodied grassroots work with workers and how it has given the organization the power to threaten, act, and mobilize for worker's rights. Similar to the Asociación's embodiment of the working-class perspective, Ni Una Menos claims all of its activists as working women. The movement appropriates the tactic of strikes to encapsulate the female working experience. With this power, Ni Una Menos is able to ensure that its demands are met by unions, following the Línea Fundadora's dialogue-oriented tradition.

Chapter four will focus on the three organizations' activism abroad. First, it will look at the Madres' use of the international community through journalists and support groups to

establish their international human rights network. This chapter will argue that, through Twitter, Ni Una Menos achieved international broadcasting power. Like the Madres' journalists and support groups, the movement's online presence allows it to expand its base of activists and provide mutual aid through its own international feminist network. Then, the chapter will discuss the international inspirations of each group. It will first address the Madres' ability to inspire other Madres movements in Latin America and replicate socialized motherhood in different times and spaces. Then, I will discuss the Ni Una Menos' ability to replicate itself outside of Latin America, building on the Madres' human rights discourse and legitimizing women's rights within a social rights rhetoric.

Finally, chapter five will conclude the thesis. It will first summarize the findings of this research and connect these findings to the larger question of the Madres' long-term mobilization outcomes within Ni Una Menos. Then, chapter five will relate the thesis' arguments and findings to future points of interest for researchers. It will discuss the Madres' scandals in contemporary Argentina, and the effects they might have on the Madres' kinship network. It will also consider the Madres' influence within their larger kinship network, in which they also socialized ties with other groups in their imagined community. Lastly, chapter five will deliberate the consequences of COVID-19 in collective action in comparison to other Argentine economic crises as an area of potential research.

## **Chapter Two: Socialized Kinship, Inheritance, and Collective Action**

### **I. Introduction**

In this chapter, I will first analyze the Madres de Plaza de Mayo's maternal activism, in which they socialized maternity and in doing so, also socialized non-biological kinship models. Through this socialization, they created a space for their continued activism and that of Ni Una Menos to revolutionize a system that cannot protect its people and even directly participates in the violence against its citizens.

Then, I will demonstrate how the Madres passed down their activism and influenced Ni Una Menos through their politicization of affective ties and kinship networks. This imagined community based on politicized kinship and emotion is a shared space in which the Madres transferred their ideological understanding of violence to Ni Una Menos. Finally, I will analyze the symbols and discourse Ni Una Menos inherited from the Madres. Ni Una Menos formed its activism within and outside the Madres' movement to apply its agenda against gender violence in contemporary Argentina. As the Madres focus on the patriarchal family to conceptualize their activism, Ni Una Menos reworks the Madres' discourse. Through a gendered lens, Ni Una Menos escapes the limitations brought on by the patriarchal tradition to revolutionize the concept of gender violence in Argentina.

### **II. Maternal Activism**

On the one hand, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora, as a group, focuses on the disappearances of their children. The group continues to exist in the present to remind society of the crimes committed under the dictatorship (Bosco 2004: 392). The Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, on the other hand, views all victims of violence as their own and takes on the

struggle left behind by their children (Bouvard 1994: 181). Both groups formed their sense of socialized maternity, in which they address the concerns of Argentine society to enact change. For the focus on kinship and lineage within the collective framework, I will draw on the discourse of the original Madres as well as the Asociación's work. I will demonstrate how the Asociación, unlike the Línea Fundadora, used this concept of socialized maternity to galvanize other activists to do the same.

### *Socialized Maternity*

The original Madres de Plaza de Mayo established a strong, socialized conception of maternity within Argentine society that pushed the traditional boundaries of motherhood. Scholars have argued that the Madres from the Asociación consider their children's revolutionary work as the catalyst of their political awareness (Bouvard 1994: 176). This kind of activism was borne of their children's militancy, instituting a sense of lineage in their work that progresses to contemporary times. In their words, being a "conventional mother" became impossible once they "[gave] birth to children who think and work for something beyond their narrow personal goals" (Bouvard 1994: 178). Because their children focused on a collective framework, and not their own "narrow personal goals," the Asociación's Madres perceive their activism in the same way, meaning it derives from and gives rise to collectivity.

As the Madres grow older, the memory of their children and their causes are at stake. A recurring theme in the Asociación's work is the concept of perpetual pregnancy. Scholars have argued that the Madres utilize their bodies as a platform to motivate new activists to continue their work (Bosco 2004: 394). According to one of the Asociación's members, a "typical Madre de Plaza de Mayo... is perpetually pregnant" and acquires her strength from "[carrying] a revolutionary son inside" (Bosco 2004: 393). The gendered assumption of "son" is indicative of

the Madres' discourse, in which the disappeared are usually referred to as male. This perpetual pregnancy implies that their children are not dead; rather, they are present if the Madres are alive because they live within them. The acceptance of their children's death would signify the end of their activism. Their pregnancy, however, implies that eventually, they will give birth to a new life. The perpetual pregnancy described by one of the Madres would then mean that they will give birth to revolutionaries, activists who will strive to change the system.

The Asociación's Madres' embodiment of their children's revolutionary politics allows them to form a path to inspire a new generation of activists. This method recognizes the preservation of memory, the preeminence of life, and the assurance of a continued struggle. If their children were the opposite of repressive politics in the 1970s, then their existence in the present suggests a new, collectivized antagonism to contemporary repression in the form of new activists.

### *Socialized Kinship*

The Madres' ability to socialize motherhood and collectivize their activism allows them to push past the boundaries of kinship-based human rights organizations. Gandsman claims that several of the human rights organizations that originated after the fall of the dictatorship were constructed "around biologically defined kin relationships" (Gandsman 2012: 205), referencing the Madres organizations, the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, and H.I.J.O.S. As Niña Cortiñas, one of the Madres, states: these human rights organizations were "made up of the relatives, mothers, grandmothers, and children of the disappeared" (Bellucci 1999: 87). Even within these movements, members view themselves and their organizations around these kinship structures. Gandsman argues that these models of citizenship based on biological relationships "curtail the wider political participation they desire" and "preclude the participation" of activists who are not

directly related to the *desaparecidos* or their families (Gandsman 2012: 209). Although the Madres and other groups want to enact change in the political system that disappeared their children, their focus on kinship could work against them in reproducing that struggle.

Yet the Madres of the Asociación further the concept of kinship in their socialized maternity, conceptualizing motherhood as not biological but as a social construct (Taylor 1997: 206). One of the Asociación's Madres claims that "the child of one is the child of all of us, not only those who are missing but the ones who are fighting for their rights today" (Bouvard 1994: 181). Children, in this kinship model, are not related by biological affiliation. Rather, kinship is constructed around ideological boundaries, in which a child does not have to be a *desaparecido* to be one of their children. A child in this kinship model is a person that is "fighting for their rights," whether economic, social, or political. The Madres socialized motherhood, and in this process also socialized the kinship model of Argentine human rights organizations. This expansion of the concept of kinship is essential in understanding the heritage they established with other collective organizations.

### *Revolutionary Mothers*

The socialization of motherhood and kinship revolutionized these concepts. Bouvard claims that they revolutionized maternity to "[demand] a political system that would reflect maternal values and assure human rights, universal participation, and social welfare" (Bouvard 1994: 62). A system that functions with maternal and kinship values emphasizes the dignity of human life and functions with this idea at the forefront of its actions. Hebe de Bonafini, the president of the Asociación, claims that they "will continue fighting for life against death, though many want [the people] to believe now that this system that enslaves and humiliates is the only one possible" (Romanin 2014: 13). She directly references the need to revolutionize the system

post-dictatorship to represent “life” because the system in which they are working is incapable of reflecting these maternal values.

The continuation of the Madres’ work implies that, although their work made an impact on the system, it has not revolutionized it completely, for that would mean an end to their struggle. According to the Asociación’s Madres, the current system does not reflect socialized and revolutionized maternity and kinship, implying that the revolution has yet to occur. Thus, the activism that is borne out of them will also have to work within and outside the state to continue and further their struggle as the heirs of the movement.

### **III. Inheritance**

By socializing motherhood, the Madres expanded the concept of kinship in collective action. In doing so, they formed the ideological spaces that Ni Una Menos works within and passed down traits and discourse to the younger movement. Ni Una Menos inherited and expanded the Madres’ activism in contemporary times to fit its agenda in its struggle against gender violence.

#### *Imagined Communities*

The original Madres de Plaza de Mayo formed an imagined community based on its dedication to truth, justice, and memory that, through affective ties between individual members and Ni Una Menos, abetted the kinship between the two groups. The affective ties in the original Madres movement date to their beginnings during the military dictatorship. When the military or the police attempted to take one of the Madres during their demonstrations, they would all charge the officers with their identification papers (Bouvard 1994: 72). Their justification for this action was simple: “If you take one, you have to take all of us” (Bouvard 1994: 72). The affection

among them is above emotion; it was a form of political resistance against the repressive tactics utilized by the military.

Bosco asserts that their imagined community is based on “an open and flexible conceptualization of network/place that allowed women to be visible... to locate their emotions, [and] to overcome distance” (Bosco 2006: 361). Moving from the private to the public sphere, the Madres created a space for women in Argentina between these two realms that tied emotions to their collective action. These affective ties connected the Madres to each other, and to the other women who occupy this space with them. Through their movement, the Madres legitimized affective ties in collective action to sustain their activism and that of others (Bosco 2006: 361).

Although the original Madres organization split in 1986, these affective ties continue to hold the groups together. One of the members of the Asociación claims that Madres from both sides “do not feel any difference” and that “it is the leaders” who divided the groups (Bosco 2006: 352). Furthermore, she reiterates that she will go to any event regardless of the host group (Bosco 2006: 352). Her statement supports the idea that the original Madres organization created and politicized these affective ties, and that these ties have endured past the schism. Bosco argues that the Madres of both organizations hold the belief that they “represent and belong to a larger network” that is “united by shared affections that developed over the years” (Bosco 2006: 352-353). The Madres’ affective ties within their imagined community surpass organizational differences; the emotional bonds they politicized continue to bind them in this shared space.

In its manifestos, Ni Una Menos constantly refers to these sanctioned affective bonds in its collective action. The movement claims that only through these “affective networks” that are “also political,” will Ni Una Menos be able to “make oppression visible, get out of the circle of



violence, [and] give strength and enthusiasm to live the lives [they] want to live” (“El grito en común: ¡Vivas nos queremos!”). While emotion is present in Ni Una Menos’ relationships with other networks, this emotion is also “political.” It drives the activists’ politics and activism, with each other and with other groups in a larger network of collective action; a space shared by the Madres. The Madres vindicated the politics of affective bonds and these bonds are now utilized by Ni Una Menos to connect the concept of gender violence to a larger “circle of violence” in Argentine society.

Furthering these affective ties, Ni Una Menos places itself in the same imagined community as the Madres. In a manifesto dedicated to one of its planned strikes, Ni Una Menos claimed that its activists were “only there because [the Madres] opened the path...in this same Plaza” (“8 Ejes para el Acto 8 M ¿Por qué paramos?”). Because the Madres created that “path” for women, Ni Una Menos can share that space. They are also directly linked by lineage: since the Madres “[socialized] maternity” and “collectivized filiation,” they “politicized familial ties” (“8F: es tiempo de desobediencia al patriarcado”). In that “same genealogical line,” the movement “stands with the common cry Ni Una Menos!” (“8F: es tiempo de desobediencia al patriarcado”). These familial ties exist outside of biology; Ni Una Menos’ collective network is a socialized one, connected through this imagined community of kinship. In that imagined community lie familial ties that create “common [cries].” Shared support between these organizations reflects family values while disrupting the traditional view of the family as biological.

### *Inherited Traits*

As Ni Una Menos inherited the Madres’ ideological understanding of violence, the movement also inherited their symbol of resistance: the *pañuelo*, or the emblematic scarves of

the Madres. The Madres' *pañuelos* are recognized around the world as symbols of resistance and maternal activism. During the beginning of their movement, one of the Madres proposed a "gauze shawl, a diaper" to identify themselves so that it would "make [them] feel closer to [their] children" (Bouvard 1994: 74).

A white shawl, or a diaper, is passed down from a parent to their children. Yet in this case, it is the parent who is wearing the shawl, convoluting the traditional roles of parent and child, and representing how the Madres took on their children's struggle that they were forced to leave behind. Again, the Madres utilize tradition to disrupt its existence, like the military dictatorship utilized traditional patriarchal values to disrupt the family and home. The scarf began as a representation of their motherhood and quickly evolved to symbolize life and re-birth as the country was plagued with the military's insistence on violence and death. It formed part of their politics of resistance as they showcased, through their presence, the significance of life in the face of repression.

While the *pañuelo* has been employed as an abstract symbol against repression, it is also utilized as a physical shield against it. When the Madres involve themselves in protests and police are present, they form a "protective cordon" around the younger activists utilizing their scarves (Bouvard 1994: 182). Their scarves represent more than their motherhood to the *desaparecidos*. The Madres socialized maternity in which they see a responsibility to protect and inspire newer activists. The power of the *pañuelo* goes further than its abstract representations; it works as a tool to ensure that repressive tactics will not stop their revolution.

The Asociación also use the *pañuelo* as a means of extending its kinship politics to recognize individuals that contributed to its cause. The *entrega de pañuelos*, or the presentation of the shawls, is a ceremony in which the Asociación presents its *pañuelos* to writers, artists,

politicians, and members of Argentine society that devoted themselves to furthering the organization's struggle against repression ("Entrega Del Pañuelo Blanco"). In a speech during one of these presentations, Hebe de Bonafini described the scarf as a "hug from their children" ("Entrega Del Pañuelo a Horacio Gonzalez"). The scarf represents the embracing of their movement during the dictatorship and afterward in their fight against state violence in all its forms. The extension of the *pañuelo* to others is the Asociación's Madres' and their children's recognition of revolutionary work.

The Madres' *pañuelos* became a national symbol in 2014, and white scarves have been painted at the Plaza de Mayo to represent the Madres' space (Conn 2018). In Argentina, national symbols include the "national colors (sky blue and white), national flower (the ceibo), national bird (the hornero), national stone (rhodochrosite), and national sport (the pato)" ("Diputados proponen convertir en símbolo nacional al pañuelo de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo"). In Congress' discussion over the matter, it was decided that the *pañuelos* "constituted... a vital part of [cultural] heritage and popular sentiment" ("Diputados proponen convertir en símbolo nacional al pañuelo de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo"). Elevated to the status of a national symbol, the *pañuelo*, as a representation of the Madres' human rights work, formed part of the nation's official history. For a nation that once dismissed the Madres as crazy women (Bouvard 2010: 3), officially recognizing the *pañuelo* as a national symbol positions the Madres' human rights work and discourse as part of Argentine history.

The *pañuelo* has become a form of Argentine national identity and protest culture, in which activists who wear a certain color show their support for the movement symbolized by the scarf: orange represents secularism, red represents the left, and blue represents Peronism (Conn 2018). Ni Una Menos adopted the purple color for its movement. Historically, purple has

represented feminist movements around the globe, from English suffragists in the early 1900s to American activists marching for the Equal Rights Amendment in 1978 (Arbat 2018).

Like many movements in Argentina, Ni Una Menos appropriated the *pañuelo* and made it its own. In Argentina, a purple scarf represents Ni Una Menos and the struggle against gender violence (Santander 2019). In June 2017, with the upcoming women's annual march on the Plaza, Ni Una Menos claimed that it was "pushed by the tide of white scarves against impunity" to march because "*machismo* is fascism from the home" ("Contra el engranaje de la violencia institucional y la violencia machista, el 3 de junio volvemos a la Plaza"). The Madres' *pañuelos* and their representation of defiance against unresolved justice inspired Ni Una Menos to protest, again referencing the space that the Madres created for other women's movements. Yet Ni Una Menos furthers this struggle by connecting the impunity that occurred after the dictatorship to the state's failure to bring to justice the perpetrators of gender violence in Argentina. If for the Madres the scarf represented life and revolution, then Ni Una Menos taking on that symbol represents a continuation of that revolution and a shift in the broadening struggle for human rights.

Purple is not the only color that symbolizes Ni Una Menos. The movement has also taken on the green scarf that symbolizes the struggle for the institutionalization of free and accessible abortions in Argentina ("8M 2018"). The color green was chosen because in the spectrum of *pañuelos* in Argentina, green was one of the only colors that had yet to be used ("Aborto: ¿Qué simboliza el pañuelo verde?"). At the same time, the *pañuelo* is an "allusion to the Madres and the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo" and thus holds a strong significance for Argentine women ("Aborto: ¿Qué simboliza el pañuelo verde?").

These green scarves are seen on “teenagers’ backpacks, and are present in numerous [everyday places], constructing a green tide” that demands the right to access abortions (“8M 2018”). The scarves are present in the landscape of Argentina, challenging the government’s failure to implement this right. Like the Madres’ white *pañuelos*, the green scarves are a constant reminder of the need for a revolution and change in a system that fails to protect its citizens from violence. The green scarves are also present on the bodies of young activists that mirror the “tide” formed by the Madres. Hundreds of Madres wearing the scarves have led to thousands of young feminist activists redefining the scarf and thus the concept of rights. These *pañuelos* do not represent a replacement of the white scarves; rather, they are a direct result of the Madres’ work to inspire new revolutionaries, in this case, revolutionaries who are demanding a system that recognizes and protects women’s rights.

### *Ideological Inheritance*

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo created an imagined community and formed an ideological territory shared among their various networks. Within this space, other collectives including Ni Una Menos appropriated and built upon these ideologies according to their agendas.

The Asociación formed a politics of critical engagement against the government’s, the Catholic Church’s, and neoliberalists’ culpability regarding structural, political, economic, and social violence during the dictatorship and in the years following. While the subsequent governments failed to bring to justice those responsible for crimes against humanity, these Madres’ claims against them went beyond criminal punishment. They believe that there was a linear relationship between the neoliberal structure implemented by the military dictatorship, the powers that enabled it, and the violence their families and society experienced.

The Asociación's critical engagement with the government extends past the dictatorship and includes the neoliberal reforms enforced by Alfonsín, Carlos Menem, and the successive administrations (Romanin 2014: 14). Hebe de Bonafini claims that "today, capitalism, large businessmen, multinational organizations... the World Bank," have made it so that "they do not kill [the poor] with bullets" but with "hunger and disease" (Romanin 2014: 15). As conceptualized by the Asociación, neoliberalism uses violence to sustain itself in Argentina, whether through state-sponsored terrorism or economic control over the poor.

This neoliberal structure was supported by the government, private institutions, and the Catholic Church. Members of the Church hierarchy concealed information about the *desaparecidos* and assisted in the tortures present at detention centers (Bouvard 1994: 53). The Church's involvement in the disappearances has been chronicled extensively, first by CONADEP and later by international entities such as the International Association Against Torture (Bouvard 1994: 53). In the search for her son, Hebe de Bonafini visited Monsignor Antonio Plaza, the bishop of La Plata, only to be questioned and investigated regarding her son's actions (Bouvard 1994: 53). The Church's complicity in the dictatorship's crimes demonstrated its hypocrisy: as the military and the Church utilized "Christian and family values" (Taylor 1997: 195) to reorganize society, they destroyed thousands of Argentine homes.

During the Argentine Independence Day celebrations in 1990, the Madres organizations decided to direct their grievances toward the Mass being held at the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Cathedral. While they were not allowed inside, they chanted "hypocrites, assassins, where are our children?" (Bouvard 1994: 230). Confronting Argentine government officials and the Argentine elite, they claimed that the Church shared culpability in its involvement in the violence during the dictatorship. This direct reference was emblematic of the Madres'

ideological understanding of violence, as its continuation reflects the government, neoliberal institutions, and the Church's participation in Argentine politics, economy, and society.

Ni Una Menos inherited the Asociación's ideological understanding of violence within Argentine society, linking religious repression and economic and state violence to their struggle against gender violence. The movement claims that the "moral terror instilled by the Church," through its attack on those who called for gender equality and its stance on abortion, is tied to the use of "crisis as financial discipline and the ability to repress in part by the armed forces" ("Apostasía Feminista para Decidir..."). In summary, "financial terror is complemented by repressive terror" ("Apostasía Feminista para Decidir..."), whether it is coming from the Church, capitalist institutions, or the government. Terror disciplines the masses, in the same way that the "*grupo de tareas*" ("Apostasía Feminista para Decidir: ¡Vivas, libres y desendeudadas nos queremos!") or the patrols of the dictatorship were repressive means of discipline against society. These authorities create moral power structures that are utilized to rebuke those individuals or groups capable of changing the system. While the methods of implementation may be different, the violence that was present during the dictatorship is still palpable. For Ni Una Menos, this violence is not accidental; it is a form of moral and repressive discipline against the masses that attempt to revolutionize the system in place.

Both the Asociación and Ni Una Menos work against economic violence in the form of neoliberalism. Yet Ni Una Menos expands the concept to connect capitalism and its culpability to the crime of femicide. While these Madres focus on the impoverishing effects of neoliberalism, Ni Una Menos directs attention toward the gender inequalities that it produces. The group claims that "within this [capitalist] framework," it is necessary to make visible the

“renovated forms of exploitation that pauperize [women’s] conditions of life and make precarious [their] existence” (“#DesendeudadasNosQueremos”).

The movement also recognizes that it was under this neoliberal framework that the “number of femicides doubled,” and that these “numbers have an intimate relationship” with neoliberalism (“#DesendeudadasNosQueremos”). This “intimate relationship” then is the connection between the neoliberal policies enacted by the government and gender violence, in the form of women’s impoverishment. Utilizing the Madres’ ideological framework, Ni Una Menos intersects gender and economic violence to demonstrate the deprecating effects of neoliberalism on women, and the culpability of the state and the institutions that ensure its implementation: The Church and private entities of capitalism.

### *Discourse Inheritance*

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo constructed a discourse based on the human rights language formed during the dictatorship. Yet their acceptance of patriarchal family structures constrained the expansion of their movement and lessened their impact on Argentine activism (Taylor 1997: 201, 207). Ni Una Menos absorbed and reformulated their kinship discourse to place women at the forefront of the conversation. In doing so, Ni Una Menos formed a lineage outside of the patriarchal tradition, in which it sees itself as a part of the same history as that of women activists in the 1970s. The movement reconceptualizes the Madres’ discourse to depart from the limitations imposed by the patriarchy. It takes on the struggle begun by the Madres and the memory of their children by revolutionizing what it means to be an activist and a citizen in contemporary Argentina.

The *desaparecidos*, or the people who were forcibly disappeared by the military junta, are the children of the Madres. In their search for the disappeared, the original Madres were



united at the Plaza chanting “*vivos los llevaron, vivos los queremos*,” “they were taken alive, we want them alive” (“La única candidatura que no se gana con votos es la de ser Madres de Revolucionarios”). As the military epitomized death, the Madres challenged the dictatorship by calling for life.

The Madres utilized this slogan to combat the military junta, whereas Ni Una Menos employs the slogan in its campaign against gender violence. The movement claims “*contra nuestros cuerpos Nunca Más. Por eso, más que nunca, ¡Vivas nos queremos!*” (“El grito en común: ¡Vivas nos queremos!”). This statement reads “against our bodies Never Again. For this reason, now more than ever, we want us alive.” *Nunca Más*, or Never Again, is a reference to CONADEP’s publication that chronicled the crimes of the dictatorship (Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared). By alluding to *Nunca Más*, Ni Una Menos asserts a direct relationship between the violence of the dictatorship and gender violence in contemporary Argentina.

At the same time, Ni Una Menos genders the Madres’ slogan: instead of utilizing the masculine pronoun “*vivos*,” the movement explicitly makes use of the feminine pronoun “*vivas*.” This transformation of language implies the use of gender to analyze the violence of the past and present. Ni Una Menos employs the Madres’ discourse to compose a larger picture of the persistence of structural violence in Argentina. Through the use of gendered pronouns in the Spanish language, the movement reformulates this discourse to deliberately place the conversation in relation to patriarchal forms of violence.

While both men and women were detained and disappeared, the Madres consistently refer to their children as “sons,” as opposed to daughters (Taylor 1997: 203). Taylor argues that this language is not a grammatical convention; rather, the Madres “repeatedly [assert] that they

had been made pregnant by their children” (Taylor 1997: 203), thus implying a gendered difference in the *desaparecidos*. Taylor claims that their focus on sons is demonstrative of their activist performance: the Madres are trapped in an “oedipal script” in which they are “empty conduits” that will only be redeemed once they “produce the new Man” (Taylor 1997: 203), or a new revolutionary son. Following this script, it is the children, not the Madres, that are the ones who are influencing and producing other revolutions; the Madres are only vessels.

Their perpetual pregnancy would render the Madres’ ability to pass down their activism obsolete. However, it is the Madres specific form of activism, not just their sons’, that inspired new waves of activism developed around affective ties, kinship, and ideological boundaries.

The Madres were the ones who created the space for Ni Una Menos and other women’s collective action in the Plaza and the country because of their motherhood to the *desaparecidos*. Ni Una Menos constantly refers to the children of the Madres in its manifestos, creating a linear timeline between the violence of the past and present. Remarking on the military trials, the group denounced “all forms of *machista* violence, including the violence of specific cruelty against women that was enforced over the bodies of [their] political mothers, the activists of the 70s... the *detenidas- desaparecidas*” (“8F: es tiempo de desobediencia al patriarcado”). Utilizing the feminine form to describe the *desaparecidas*, Ni Una Menos claims a direct lineage not to the sons, but to the revolutionary daughters who were disappeared. Furthering its argument, the movement claims that the *desaparecidas* were their political mothers. This heritage is explicitly evident in Marta Dillon, a founder of Ni Una Menos and the daughter of a *detenida-desaparecida* (Dillon and Ludueña 2018). While the Madres claim their sons will be the ones to reproduce new revolutionaries, Ni Una Menos places itself and its activists in the direct lineage of the Madres and their daughters as well.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The Madres, especially the Asociación's Madres, derived their ability to socialize maternity from their own identity as mothers to the *desaparecidos*, who inspired them to collectivize their activism. The socialization of motherhood implies a new kind of revolution to combat contemporary repression. Their view of maternity also influenced their socialization of kinship networks in which their ability to socialize these familial ties between movements allowed them to push past the limitations of their group. These Madres' identities as revolutionary mothers necessitate the birth of new movements that, like theirs and that of their children, intend to revolutionize the Argentine political, social, and economic system to reflect maternal and thus familial values that embody the respect for human life.

The socialized kinship networks built by the Madres sustained activism: Ni Una Menos is just one of many organizations that work within this framework. It became necessary for the Madres to politicize emotion, as their affective ties proved a vital symbolic and physical resistance to the dictatorship and the violence in the subsequent administrations. These affective ties created the space for other women activists to politicize emotion in their movements. They are present within Ni Una Menos and its larger kinship network, reinforcing emotion as a political tool against repression. The space constructed by the Madres and shared by Ni Una Menos also formed an imagined community in which affective and familial ties were politicized, thus utilizing traditional values to disrupt traditional and contemporary roles of violence.

Within this imagined community is also a shared ideological space and understanding of the concept of violence upheld by the state, the Catholic Church, and neoliberal institutions. The state backs the other institutions, all of which work together to instill violence and thus repress

its citizens. The Madres view the Church as implicated in the dictatorship's crimes, while Ni Una Menos expands on this by claiming that it is a form of repression against women and their human rights. On the one hand, neoliberalism and its counterparts are viewed by the Madres as a form of economic violence against the poor. Ni Una Menos, on the other hand, places this form of capitalism within gendered terms to emphasize how neoliberalism impoverishes Argentina's people and disproportionately demonizes its women.

Through familial ties in this imagined community and ideology, Ni Una Menos inherited symbols of the Madres' resistance. The Madres' white *pañuelos* are a symbol and a powerful tool against the military and the democratic government's repressive tactics. The *pañuelos* reinforce these kinship structures and the need to revolutionize a system that upholds and fortifies violence. This symbolism and action inspired Ni Una Menos to become part of this revolution, in which the movement shifts the significance of the *pañuelos* to fit the contemporary context of violence it is working within.

Ni Una Menos also inherited and redefined the discourse of the Madres. Ni Una Menos utilizes feminine pronouns when restructuring the Madres' discourse to place the persistence of violence in Argentina within a patriarchal context. The Madres' references to their sons instead of their daughters had left other struggles against violence out of the revolutionary picture and downplayed their role as women in their activism. Ni Una Menos' ability to connect the Madres' language to that of its own demonstrates a direct lineage in their activism. The movement also rewrote the "bad script" or oedipal discourse (Taylor 1997: 203) to break out of patriarchal boundaries and expand on the revolution necessitated by the Madres and the memory of the *desaparecidos* and *desaparecidas*.

## Chapter Three: Collective Action on the Homefront

### I. Introduction

This chapter will focus on the domestic actions taken by the Madres organizations and Ni Una Menos. I will argue that Ni Una Menos inherited the Línea Fundadora's dialogue and horizontal structure, the Asociación's mobilization directive and working-class perspective, and each of the group's body politics to progress its movement against gender violence within Argentina.

First, I will evaluate the structures and objectives of each of the Madres organizations and compare them to the structure and objectives of the Ni Una Menos movement. The schism within the Madres movement was due in large part to their organizational preferences. The Línea Fundadora's Madres favored a horizontal and democratic structure that mirrored their work within democratic structures, while the Asociación's radicalized Madres preferred an independent, hierarchical, and vertical organization that emulated a familial structure. Ni Una Menos inherited the Línea Fundadora's rejection of a hierarchal structure; it organizes horizontally and democratically.

However, the Asociación's ideological framework and objectives had a greater influence on the new generation of activists than those of the Línea Fundadora. The Línea Fundadora's main objectives are to remind society of the dictatorship's atrocities and their children. It functions as an interest group within Argentine democracy, and thus, unlike the Asociación, it does not intend to revolutionize the system. In contrast, the Asociación aims to challenge Argentina's political and economic hierarchies. Its independent and vertical structure allows the organization to transmit its use of activism and inspire the grassroots activism of younger generations. Through this activism, the Asociación emulates a familial structure to pass down the

original Madres' actions of first mobilizing, then organizing. With grassroots activism at the root of the movement, Ni Una Menos takes the Asociación's lead and collectivizes to include its diverse base of participants to act out against gender violence.

This chapter will then analyze how Ni Una Menos acquired both Madres organizations' body politics. The Línea Fundadora focuses on the Madres' bodies as a space for commemoration, or an act of remembrance, for the *desaparecidos*. Its use of commemoration and not combative politics is indicative of its dedication to working within the democratic system. The Asociación employs commemoration but also furthers its body politics by embodying the ideals of the revolutionary *desaparecidos*. Ni Una Menos combines the Línea Fundadora's use of commemoration and the Asociación's embodiment of revolutionary politics. The movement unifies the struggle for remembrance with that of gender violence to progress the fight for women's rights within and outside the democratic system. This chapter will interpret the Madres organizations' practice of *poner el cuerpo*, the act of placing one's body at the forefront of the movement. I will then argue that Ni Una Menos inherited this strategy, utilizing *poner el cuerpo* to commemorate and embody past activists, and to debase the government's control of women's bodies through collectivized action.

Finally, I will consider the Madres organizations' and Ni Una Menos' outward relations with the working-class. This section of the chapter will primarily focus on Ni Una Menos' inheritance of the Asociación's working-class perspective, as the Línea Fundadora does not utilize this framework in its activism. Through its vertical structure, the Asociación built a familial relationship with the grassroots of the working-class while also pressuring union leaders, specifically the CGT, to act in the interest of Argentine workers. This chapter will analyze how Ni Una Menos adapted the Asociación's working-class perspective to shift the focus to working

women and empower them through its relationship with the CGT. In its working-class framework, Ni Una Menos inherited the Línea Fundadora's non-combative activism to ensure that the movement's demands are met by unions.

## **II. Organizational Structures**

The two Madres factions are divided philosophically as well as through their organizational structures. The Línea Fundadora's horizontal structure is representative of its commitment to democracy and works within its processes and structures. The Asociación practices a combative politics that necessitates a restructuring of the democratic system, as it believes this system been corrupted in Argentina. However, the Asociación's vertical structure does not mean it has abandoned the Madres' democratic ideals. While the organization is run hierarchically, it functions as an independent democracy and as an extension of its socialized maternity. This vertical structure emulates a familial one that is utilized to promote democratic citizenship and mobilization to younger grassroots activists. The differences in the Madres' organizations reflect their ideology and member profiles; the Línea Fundadora's non-combative politics is emblematic of its upper-class membership, while the Asociación's focus on grassroots activism is tied to its working-class perspective.

Ni Una Menos inherited the Línea Fundadora's horizontal structure, which allows the movement to broaden its participatory activism and agenda against gender violence. Ni Una Menos works within a collective grassroots framework, in which leadership constitutes a position of broadcasting power and not a hierarchical structure. While Ni Una Menos did not inherit the Asociación's vertical structure, the Asociación passed down its ideology of first mobilizing, then organizing to the movement. As the Asociación produces grassroots work in

Argentina, Ni Una Menos continues the Asociación's activism yet shifts its organizational structure to fit its diverse makeup of activists and expand its goals and mobilizations.

### *The Construction of the Madres Organizations*

The leading reason for the original Madres' schism arose from their differences in structural preferences. The original group that formed in 1977 and officially registered in 1979 as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo was organized hierarchically with a President and Vice President, meaning it had a vertical structure (Bosco 2004: 383, Bouvard 1994: 94). As it became increasingly centralized and vertically oriented, in 1986 fourteen mothers left, claiming that this was "not conducive to [the] full participation of all members" (Bosco 2004: 384). The dissenters from the Asociación formed the Línea Fundadora with a "decentralized form of activism" to "foment internal democracy and benefit the group in the long term" (Bosco 2004: 384). In the early days of the movement, the original Madres sought to embody democratic values as an alternative to the repressive politics of the dictatorship (Bouvard 1994: 59). For some Madres of the Línea Fundadora, the growing insistence on a vertical structure became a threat to those values that had brought them together in the first place.

Bouvard argues that this division in leadership is rooted in class distinctions between members (Bouvard 1994: 16). The Línea Fundadora is "closer to the socio-economic and educational backgrounds of many feminists," and thus chose to "work within the political system" (Bouvard 1994: 16). The Asociación, in contrast, was composed of more working-class women who considered feminism to "[represent] privileged circles" (Bouvard 1994: 191). These Madres "believe in women's struggle, but not in the women who have another woman cleaning their floors" (Bouvard 1994: 191). The Asociación's complicated relationship with upper-class activism influenced its actions after the dictatorship, when it took on a "radical political stance"



(Bouvard 1994: 16), considering all victims of violence to be their children and thus revolutionizing the concept of motherhood.

The Línea Fundadora was an “interest group” within the new democratic system, while the Asociación was a combative “opposition group” to the inequalities that this system perpetrated (Bouvard 1994: 163)<sup>2</sup>. Although the Línea Fundadora opposed the *Punto Final* or Full Stop Law and the pardons of the Menem presidency, these Madres still “wished to express their support for the government” (Bouvard 1994: 163, Madres de Plaza de Mayo- Línea Fundadora 2007). As an interest group, the Línea Fundadora’s dedication to democracy leads it to express its concerns without destabilizing Argentina’s precarious democracy. While the Línea Fundadora worked to recover the history and remind society of their specific missing children, the Asociación radicalized to continue their children’s legacy of fighting for a more just future for all.

Both organizations carry on their messages every Thursday, united in their walks around the Plaza and distinguished by the markings on their headscarves. The Asociación controls most of the Madres chapters around the country, centralized around Hebe de Bonafini and the headquarters in Buenos Aires (Bosco 2004: 384). In an interview with Redacción Perfil, the Línea Fundadora claimed that, unlike Hebe de Bonafini, the Línea Fundadora’s Madres “have always wanted a horizontal” organization (Redacción Perfil 2011). In one of the Línea Fundadora’s letters, these Madres delineate themselves as an organization that focuses on “equality of responsibilities” between them, where all of them hold the same level of

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<sup>2</sup> For the scope of this thesis, I will not delve into the different political party associations of the Madres. There is a detailed and volatile history between both of the Madres organizations and political parties in Argentina. Generally, the Madres organizations have not associated themselves with political parties in Argentina. However, many of the Madres of the Asociación hold a close relationship with Peronism, socialism, and its ideals (Bouvard 1994: 177). In recent times, the Asociación has developed an intimate relationship with the Kirchners and the Justicialist political party (Romanin 2014), while the Línea Fundadora’s letters and practices exemplify its non-partisan ideology (Madres de Plaza de Mayo - Línea Fundadora 2007, Redacción Perfil 2011).

“representativeness” (The Madres de Plaza de Mayo - Línea Fundadora 2007). These Madres believe that the Asociación’s vertical structure undermined the original Madres’ democratic values (Bosco 2004: 384).

Yet the persistence of the Asociación’s vertical, hierarchical structure does not mean it abandoned the democratic values the organization promoted in the first place. The group’s vertical structure constitutes a top-down approach, in which Hebe de Bonafini leads the organization as President. It is run as a “direct democracy” in which all members participate and is not modeled after “either political parties or more traditional interest groups” (Bouvard 1994: 188). The difference in organization and action to that of the Línea Fundadora is that the Asociación believes that the political system, although democratic, is “inherently corrupt” (Bouvard 1994: 188). With a President at the top of the hierarchy, the Asociación’s organization mirrors the formation of the Argentine political system. However, the organization is “not interested in bargaining and negotiating in the traditional manner” (Bouvard 1994: 188), thus it presents an independent model from the political system. In response to the corruption of Argentina’s democratic structures, the Asociación created its own, alternative system based on verticality and hierarchy. The corrupt political system necessitates its work not as an interest group, but as a combative organization that produces its own form of knowledge and revolution.

Through its imitation of and separation from the political system, the Asociación provides an alternative system that focuses on grassroots activism to restructure democracy. The organization’s main goal is to “guide others toward independence and effectiveness rather than to impose [its] own ideas” (Bouvard 1994: 188). Thus, it is not looking to “impose” its vertical structure; instead, the Asociación lends support and knowledge to the grassroots to become independent from the political system.

The Asociación's alternative system, Bouvard argues, is a "reflection" of its "mothering" through its combination of "nurture with preparation for separation" (Bouvard 1994: 188). In Argentina, political mentoring has historically "been reserved for fathers" instructing their sons into "positions of power" or "militancy" (Bouvard 1994: 189). The Asociación provides an alternative to patriarchal political mentorship, in which a matriarchal hierarchy is put in place to emulate a familial structure to provide political mentorship for grassroots activists. Unlike the corrupt hierarchy of the political system, the Asociación's vertical and hierarchical structure emulates a matriarchal family based on "mothering" and "[nurturing]."

The Asociación's independence from the political system is fundamental in its production of knowledge. Apart from having their archive and newspaper (Bouvard 1994: 255), these Madres contribute to public awareness through Hebe de Bonafini's "*Mateando con Hebe*," or "Drinking *Mate* with Hebe" ("Mateando con Hebe"). These weekly updates are streamed online from the Asociación's headquarters in Buenos Aires. In them, Hebe de Bonafini speaks to the group's supporters, retelling the history of the organization, its experiences, and current work. In these chats, Hebe addresses the audience as she sips *mate*, a social Argentine drink, and engages the audience. This setting resembles that of a family, a conversation headed by a maternal figure over a meal, in which she passes along her knowledge and experience to younger generations of activists.

'*Mateando con Hebe*' is consistent with the Asociación's vision of itself as a "guide" to the "grassroots" (Bouvard 1994: 188). This guidance is structured around how they "let [the grassroots activists] know that first [the Madres] mobilized [themselves]" and then later organized, "which is the opposite of the political parties which organized themselves before they mobilized" (Bouvard 1994: 188). Through its vertical and familial structure, the Asociación

utilizes its power to broadcast knowledge to younger generations of grassroots activists to inspire collectivity and continue the legacy of revolution. Although outside of the political system, the Asociación's vertical structure continues to work with democratic values through its ability to foment participatory and democratic citizenship models in grassroots activism.

### *The Horizontal Foundation of Ni Una Menos*

While the Madres first mobilized through their public appearances, Ni Una Menos launched online and then later took to the streets in protest of the lack of governmental response to femicide and gender violence. Ni Una Menos started as a viral conversation on Twitter among a few journalists in 2015 (Annunziata et al. 2016: 47). These journalists do not consider themselves leaders; rather, they were the “drivers,” “*impulsoras*,” of the movement (Annunziata et al. 2016: 48). Thus, like the Línea Fundadora, Ni Una Menos functions within a horizontal structure, in which hierarchy does not exist.

Yet the Línea Fundadora's Madres focus on their interests as mothers to the disappeared, while Ni Una Menos orients its agenda around the experiences of gender violence victims within a patriarchal structure. Its approach is bottom-up with action and demands coming from the general public, not from the few interests of a group, and places the conversation of gender violence within larger, structural issues of violence.

Because of its horizontal structure, Ni Una Menos created a wide enough agenda that when new gendered issues arose, like the debate on the legalization of abortion, they could be incorporated into the slogan (Annunziata et al. 2016: 54). The broad call for Ni Una Menos, for Not One [Woman] Less, meant that all forms of gender violence, including the deaths of women who were unable to access proper abortions, could be absorbed into the movement. This level of horizontalism was only possible because of new technologies and networks within social media

(Castro 2018: 43). Instead of focusing on the interests of a few, through Twitter and other social media outlets Ni Una Menos was able to produce a broad agenda and achieve mass dissemination of news and collaboration among participants.

This mobilization did not come about intentionally, as the “*impulsoras* of the movement were not an organized group” (Annunziata et al. 2016: 48). Through Twitter conversations, and by first mobilizing and then organizing, Ni Una Menos emulated the grassroots activism that the Asociación promotes. Yet its organizational structure differs from the Asociación in its rejection of a vertical framework. Instead, one of the main *impulsoras* of Ni Una Menos claims that when someone “launches a slogan like [Ni Una Menos] on the street, it starts to roll, and it no longer belongs to [them]” (Annunziata et al. 2016: 52). Because it first mobilized on Twitter and then later became organized, the movement required a horizontal structure to include all the voices of the grassroots that allowed the movement to take off in the first place.

The subsequent marches continued the philosophy of horizontalism under which the movement began. During its first march on June 3, 2015, Ni Una Menos planned an activity in which participants were given the space to denounce social tolerance of gender violence by recounting “their own experiences in the form of testimonies as victims of gender violence” (Castro 2018: 42). Unlike the Asociación in which the organization’s public voice is centered around Hebe de Bonafini, these marches have the participants’ and victims’ voices at the forefront of the movement. Ni Una Menos’ production of knowledge comes from its grassroots activists; without leaders and verticality, the focus of the movement is on all the participants. Through their voices, they retell history with their experiences as victims of gender violence and as witnesses to the marches. By claiming this space, the movement ensures that all the diverse voices of gender violence victims are heard by the public consciousness.

### III. The Embodiment of Politics: The Body as a Platform

Both Madres organizations, the Línea Fundadora and the Asociación, employ body politics to strengthen their activism. In other words, the body provides a space for and reinforces their activism. Scholars have argued that their bodies become a form of “political resistance,” as the physicality of their bodies, or their life, constitutes an antithesis to repressive politics (Gandsman 2012: 209).

As these two factions march on the Plaza, they commemorate and embody a politics of resistance that is visible in their activism. The Madres of the Línea Fundadora commemorate, or remember, their disappeared children through their bodies. The Asociación also commemorates their children but focuses on commemorating the *desaparecidos*' political activism. As they commemorate, the Madres of the Asociación embody the politics of the *desaparecidos*, or act in the way they would have acted. By embodying their children and their work, the Madres of the Asociación can continue the revolutionary activism the *desaparecidos* were forced to leave behind.

Ni Una Menos has taken this form of physical activism and implemented it into its movement. By utilizing their bodies in their commemoration and activism, the movement's activists also emphasize life over death in the face of femicide brought upon by the patriarchal system. They commemorate past activists while also embodying the politics of the *desaparecidas* in their activism to dismantle the patriarchal system. In its body politics, Ni Una Menos works inside and outside the democratic system to subvert gender oppression.

### *Commemoration and the Embodiment of Politics*

Points of contention between the two Madres organizations are visible in their body politics. The Línea Fundadora faction recognizes the *desaparecidos* by embroidering the individual names of their children on their white *pañuelos* (Bosco 2004: 392). Bosco argues that their bodies become a place of commemoration: these Madres walk around the Plaza with “portraits of their sons and daughters pinned to their clothing” (Bosco 2004: 392). By employing their bodies to recreate the images of the *desaparecidos*, the members of the Línea Fundadora ensure that their children have a physical presence in the present to not be forgotten. The Línea Fundadora’s Madres’ identities are tied to their individual children who were disappeared; if their children had not been disappeared, they would not be the activists they are today.

The Asociación’s Madres do not embroider the names onto their headscarves or carry images of their children who disappeared. Instead, embroidered on their headscarves are the words “*Aparición Con Vida de los Detenidos Desaparecidos*,” or “Apparition with Life of the Detained and Disappeared” (see Figure 1). Yet the *desaparecidos* are known to have been tortured and murdered by the Argentine military junta, thus it is seemingly impossible for them to appear back alive. The Asociación justifies the “Apparition with Life” statement through its actions: these Madres see themselves as extensions of their children. The Asociación leader Hebe de Bonafini claims that “if [their children] are no longer, [she has] had to be them, to shout for them, to return them” (Bouvard 1994: 182). While acknowledging that the *desaparecidos* are unable to be present, Hebe circumvents this by claiming she is one of them by “[shouting] for them,” and thus “[returning] them.” Through representations of their voices and actions, the Asociación’s Madres assure that their children are in attendance by way of their constant

presence. They embody their children and their politics; the “apparition with life” is the presence and existence of the Madres.



Figure 1: *Aparición Con Vida de los Detenidos Desaparecidos*<sup>3</sup>

The Asociación’s insistence that “*todos son mis hijos*” or “everyone is my child” is an extension of their motherhood to the *desaparecidos* and embodiment of their politics (“*Todos son mis hijos*”). In 1990, a young mother came to the Asociación’s office and told of the abduction of her husband, a former *desaparecido*, by the police. In response, the Madres brought the woman to the Plaza to tell her story, and this denunciation led to the subsequent release of her husband (Bouvard 1994: 187). These Madres gave the young mother the space to denounce her husband’s abduction and the police’s involvement, the arm of the government that was also involved in the dictatorship’s disappearances. Through its actions, the Asociación, like their children, works against violent systems in place that are extensions of the violence during the

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<sup>3</sup> Fabatía 2014



dictatorship. These Madres' presence is more than a reminder to society of past violence; their occupation of the Plaza is how they continue their children's struggle through their constant work against all state repression. The Asociación's Madres' commemoration of their children is their presence and their ability to act how their children would have acted, thus their embodiment of their children's politics.

The Ni Una Menos movement combines both of the Madres organizations' commemoration and embodied activism to denounce past crimes and connect them to the larger, systematic violence experienced by women in Argentina. During the trial against the perpetrators of the dictatorship for the *detenida-desaparecida* Marta Taboada, the movement extended its support for Marta Dillon, Taboada's daughter and a Ni Una Menos founder. In doing so, Ni Una Menos claimed a part in the struggle against "the cruelty of yesterday and today" ("8F: es tiempo de desobediencia al patriarcado"). Ni Una Menos defined this cruelty as that of the violence "against women that was applied to the body," and as a "message" that is "recorded on [all women's] bodies that comes back as a collective fury and a desire for justice" ("8F: es tiempo de desobediencia al patriarcado").

Marta Dillon herself adds that feminism is integral in the struggle for human rights; these fights come hand-in-hand. She claims that feminism "opened the possibility for women to speak... of the sexual crimes" committed under the dictatorship so that it could be "understood" that these crimes "were not just another form of torture" (Dillon and Ludueña 2018). In other words, feminism placed these crimes against women in the context of patriarchal structural violence. Marta declares that in the detention centers, the "bodies of women, little girls and boys were taken as spoils of war, where violent messages were inscribed with moralizing purposes for [the women] and their *compañeros*" (Dillon and Ludueña 2018). With these "violent messages,"

the bodies of women became spaces in which violence was justified by traditional and patriarchal morals, or the military's moral power structures. The response to this violence, then, is tied to the dismantling of such "messages" and morals.

In its extension of solidarity, Ni Una Menos views itself as part of a continued struggle passed on by generations of female activists, the *desaparecidas*. By coming to the trial and supporting the *desaparecida*'s family, Ni Una Menos commemorates Marta Taboada in assuring she is not forgotten, similarly to the Línea Fundadora's acts of commemoration toward their children. This solidarity is not just one of continued struggle for remembrance. This unification of activism is attached to the violence that is played out on women's bodies then and in the present. Because of their connection as women who experienced personal and systematic violence over their bodies, these activists utilize the "message" or connection between these struggles to collectively denounce this violence and demand justice for past and present victims.

Like the Línea Fundadora's commitment to democracy, Ni Una Menos' presence at the criminal trial demonstrates a level of confidence in the justice system and the movement's ability to work within democratic structures. Yet Ni Una Menos, like the Asociación, also embodies the politics of the *detenidas-desaparecidas* to condemn perpetrators and unify struggles against violence. During the trial, many Ni Una Menos activists came out to show their support for Marta Dillon. In the images from the trial, these activists are seen wearing "Ni Una Menos" shirts while displaying images of Marta Taboada in front of them (see Figure 2). Like the Madres of the Línea Fundadora, Ni Una Menos activists exhibit their bodies as an act of commemoration to the *desaparecida*. Through this demonstration, they are ensuring Taboada's presence as an activist. In doing so, they validate the argument that if it was not for the perpetrators of such violence, Taboada would be alive in the present. Similar to the Línea Fundadora's Madres, these

activists' identities are tied to the violence experienced by the *detenidas-desaparecidas* during the dictatorship. Even more explicitly, Marta Dillon is present as a witness and as a direct descendant of the *desaparecida* (Dillon and Ludueña 2018); her identity as an activist in Ni Una Menos is inherently linked to her mother's militant work against the dictatorship.



Figure 2: Ni Una Menos Activists at the trial for Marta Taboada<sup>4</sup>

The activists are not just holding up the image of Taboada; they are placing it in front of their bodies, which are marked with the words “Ni Una Menos.” Like the Asociación’s work, this is an act of commemoration and embodied activism. They are commemorating Taboada’s work as an activist during the military’s repression, and also associating it with their work against systematic violence in the present. These activists are utilizing their bodies to indicate the violence against Taboada’s body and connect it to their experience as women in Argentine society. They embodied the “message” that has been inscribed on Taboada’s body and that of their own.

While they are at the trial and thus upholding democratic processes, their presence as activists against gender violence represents the failures of the justice system to protect its women citizens, then and now. Likewise, these grassroots activists are seen with the word “revolution” on their shirts (see Figure 2), demonstrating the failures of democracy in halting this violence

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<sup>4</sup> “8F: es tiempo de desobediencia al patriarcado”

and also the need to change the system to ensure the end of gender violence. By implicating their physical presence with that of Taboada, they commemorate and embody the *detenida-desaparecida*'s struggle by continuing to denounce the systematic violence that she fought against, and that persevered in their own bodies' experiences within the patriarchal system.

Ni Una Menos intersects both of the Madres' organizations' democratic values to demonstrate its activism. The movement's activists present themselves at events such as criminal trials, exhibiting their willingness to work within the democratic system. Yet the presence of these activists also implies that democracy has failed to protect its citizens, as the activists would not be present if the democratic system did not ensure the erasure of gender violence after the dictatorship. Like the Asociación, Ni Una Menos demonstrates that a grassroots revolution is necessary to dismantle the patriarchal system that allows this violence to persist.

In its activism, the movement utilizes the Línea Fundadora's use of commemorative body politics to make certain that the *desaparecidas*, the women who were disappeared, are not forgotten. The activists also inherited the Asociación's combination of commemoration and embodied politics. Ni Una Menos' activists commemorate the work that has been done by previous women activists and connect this struggle with that of their own against the patriarchy's violence. The activists embody the *desaparecidas*' politics by acting out against the same patriarchal and systematic violence that disappeared them, and that is imposed on their bodies as Argentine women by these persisting structures.

### *Poner el cuerpo*

The repressive politics exacerbated by the military junta and then restructured by subsequent democratic governments have been forced onto the bodies of Argentine citizens. Taylor argues that in the original Madres' performance, as they politicized their maternity, they

became “mediators in an old drama between fathers and sons” (Taylor 1997: 205). The main war, then, was between the “fathers,” or the military junta, and the “sons,” or the dissenters of the regime. Because of their emphasis on their role as mothers, the Madres became a part of a performative, patriarchal script. Taylor states that “as the women marched around the Plaza, as they were harassed, arrested, tortured, and disappeared, the battle continued to be fought on the female body” (Taylor 1997: 205). This “battle” between the two entities, the military junta and its citizens, was one that was experienced by the Madres because of the disappearance of their children and of the violence they experienced fighting for them.

While this narrative tends to eclipse the *detenidas-desaparecidas*, the women activists, from the broader struggle, it brings to light the Madres’ reality during the dictatorship. They too felt the wrath of the junta on their bodies as they demanded their children’s appearance. Bouvard claims that the military “defined” the body “by reason,” and thus it became a “mere instrument of military will” (Bouvard 1994: 182). In other words, the junta characterized the body in rational terms, or how it could be utilized to progress and subvert Argentine society. This definition allowed the junta to justify the erasure and disappearance of bodies from daily life. The Madres’ activism then was a direct opposition to the forced disappearance of their children’s bodies. As they multiplied in numbers in the Plaza, they demonstrated the “absence/presence of all those who had disappeared without a trace, without leaving a body” (Taylor 1997: 198). Through their physical presence and their bodies, the Madres created an antithesis to “reason:” the presence of life.

This form of activism is known as *‘poner el cuerpo,’* or the literal act of placing a physical body into the movement. In Argentina, this tactic is seen as “a practice of resistance... a collective, embodied process that sprouts solidarity and valuable knowledge” (Sutton 2007: 176).

Hebe de Bonafini constantly employs this phrase to describe the original Madres' activism: *poner el cuerpo* was and is necessary for their movement because "the only thing [the Madres] have to put is the body" (Ciudad Siberia 2016). The emphasis is on the "lived, bodily experience" (Gandsman 2012: 209), as mothers whose bodies experienced the violence of the dictatorship and as physical and present reminders of that violence. While the 'body' is an individual entity, the Madres demonstrate how in a movement, it becomes a place in which activism takes a physical presence and becomes a collective component of change.

In a similar form, the Ni Una Menos movement came about because of the assault on the female body that has been instituted by the patriarchal system. Ni Una Menos focuses on the act of violence against the female body, as it is a "locus" in which the "predatory potential of patriarchal domination" is acted out (Rovetto 2015: 14). The movement has been criticized because of its emphasis on corporeality as this focus can individualize pain instead of collectivizing it to promote action (Rovetto 2015: 27).

Yet, like the Madres, the movement also emphasizes the body as a place where life can dominate over death. As the government continues to deny free and legal access to abortions in Argentina, the movement demands the autonomy of a woman's body. Ni Una Menos claims the body as autonomous, yet not as "private property" but as a "communal framework that all people need to live and develop, to take care of each other collectively" ("#8A El fuego es nuestro"). Ni Una Menos understands the female body as not "private" or individualized, but as a necessary component of a functioning, collective network. For the movement, autonomy and collectivity are not analogous. The Madres argue that the absence of one necessitates the presence of another; Ni Una Menos demands the presence of lived bodies for collective society to function.

Claiming “Ni Una Menos” means women should be “alive, complete, autonomous, sovereign” (“El grito en común: ¡Vivas nos queremos!”). Women’s control of their bodies, according to Ni Una Menos, means the presence of their volition in its existence. This argument is present in the activists’ work on the streets: in this image, an activist shows off the writing on her body at a Ni Una Menos march (see Figure 3). The writing reads “we are the witches that you were not able to burn,” a common cry visible throughout the Ni Una Menos marches. This statement is a reference to Silvia Federici, an Italian feminist author that articulates witch hunts in the context of capitalism (Doyle 2019). She argues that these witch hunts were “instrumental to the construction of a patriarchal order in which the bodies of women... were placed under the control of the State” (Federici and Gago 2015). These witch-hunters looked to “eliminate generalized forms of female behavior that they no longer tolerated and that had to become seen as abominable in the eyes of the population” (Federici and Gago 2015).

Like the Línea Fundadora’s Madres’ commemoration through their bodies, Ni Una Menos activists utilize their bodies to commemorate victims of past violence. In this case, the activist is commemorating the women who were seen as disobedient and thus murdered for their unwillingness to conform, connecting Federici’s argument to that of femicide. Yet this act also goes beyond commemoration: the woman, like many other activists in the movement (Castro 2018: 44), painted these words on her naked body (see Figure 3). By painting the naked body and placing it within the march, a subversive action, the activist claimed autonomy of it over the state. In a public space, activists utilize their bodies to subvert the government’s control of public life and become part of the collective whole of society. The body is also autonomous; it does not succumb to the repressive politics that deny a woman’s volition over it. Like the Asociación’s

embodiment of politics, Ni Una Menos' activists embody the politics of the female body. Activists privilege women's power over their bodies, denying the state's control of it.



Figure 3: Ni Una Menos Activist<sup>5</sup>

Painted and unpainted activists alike fill the streets during these marches, *poniendo su cuerpo*, or placing their body, at the forefront of the movement. Annunziata et al. argue that in Ni Una Menos, the most “fundamental” part of the movement’s beginnings was that it implied one had to “*poner el cuerpo*” and generate a “non-virtual” event in the “streets” (Annunziata et al. 2016: 65). Thus, the actions formed online had to become visible in the physical mobilization of people to iterate and emphasize the issue as a public one.

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<sup>5</sup> “Fotos 8M”



Ni Una Menos makes visible the physicality of violence on the body as an element of denunciation that cannot be encompassed by words alone. Placing the body on the front lines is then an act of defiance as the body is being dismantled in these crimes. Both Madres groups and Ni Una Menos use their bodies against different forms of violence. *Poner el cuerpo* is not just the concept of life; it is the physical representation of it, the body, a space in which violence and power have played out. For the Madres, because the bodies of their children are absent, they must present their own to antagonize repression's emphasis on death. In the Ni Una Menos movement, *poner el cuerpo* means to exalt life and to collectivize action. The presence of bodies in a public space subverts the state's control over women's existence.

The movement's use of *poner el cuerpo* commemorates the Madres' legitimization of this tactic in Argentine collective action. Like both of the Madres' organizations, Ni Una Menos activists also commemorate victims and activists from the past through their bodies. As the Asociación embodies the politics of the *desaparecidos*, Ni Una Menos' activists embody the politics of past women activists through their representation in their mobilizations. Like both of the Madres, Ni Una Menos utilizes the body to represent life against repression, in this case, the woman's body in the struggle for autonomy against the state. Yet it also means to collectivize action; for Ni Una Menos, the bodies of activists together show a collective struggle against the patriarchal state that attempts to exalt power over them.

#### **IV. Instilling the Working-Class Perspective**

When the group began, the original Madres organization varied in its class profile, which contributed to its schism: 54% of them were working-class (Taylor 1997: 187). While the more

upper-class women of the Línea Fundadora preferred a less combative politics (Bouvard 1994: 16), the Asociación doubled down on its commitment to working-class ideals.

Ni Una Menos works within this working-class framework, fighting for the rights of working-class women in the workplace. For this section, I will primarily focus on the Asociación's working-class activism in comparison to that of Ni Una Menos, as the Línea Fundadora does not act within this structure.

### *A Traditional, Working-Class Framework*

The Asociación works within a working-class framework, in which it aligns itself with the *compañeros*, leftist working-class activists, to promote grassroots activism and a more equitable future for Argentine common laborers. The Asociación identifies itself as “clearly on the left” (Bouvard 1994: 55), yet its solidarity with workers is more than just political ideology. These Madres' adherence to working-class idealism is tied to the identity of the *desaparecidos*, their children. They claim that “50% of the *desaparecidos*” were “*trabajadores*,” workers who were disappeared because of their leftist ideologies and union ties (“Carta de Hebe a la CGT”). Because they see themselves as a continuation of their children's existence, they too are *trabajadores*, with common goals for the Argentine working-class. These Madres consistently speak at trade union centers, reminding them that their children's fight for a more just future must be continued by the Madres and by union workers (Madres de la Plaza Nro 581 - Las Madres visitan el Sindicato de Obreros Curtidores).

Their target audience within these unions is not the union leaders but rather the masses of young workers, like their children. For the Asociación, this is intentional: they have “focused their efforts upon the grassroots of the labor movement” (Bouvard 1994: 51) because of their dark history with the heads of labor unions. The CGT, or the General Confederation of Labor, in

Argentina is a highly bureaucratized labor federation with deep ties to the government stemming from its relationship with the regime of Perón (Bouvard 1994: 21, 51, 227). During the dictatorship, many union leaders of the CGT collaborated with the junta and “were instrumental in the large-scale disappearances” of *trabajadores* (Bouvard 1994: 51), many of whom were the Madres’ children. Many victims accused the leaders of the CGT of handing over lists of workers to the military junta (Gatzela and Soler 2018).

Because of the CGT’s ties to the junta, the Asociación’s relationship with the trade union’s bureaucracy has been as combative as it has been with the democratic governments post-dictatorship. In October 2016, when a large Argentine corporation began to lay off workers, Hebe de Bonafini wrote a scathing letter to the CGT. She claimed that the Madres were aware of all the “shameful agreements” they had made “against workers” in the past; if they “felt any shame,” they should call a “general strike,” and if not then they must “allow the true workers” to take over the CGT (“Carta de Hebe a la CGT”). The Asociación’s network published and circulated this letter, making it visible to the CGT leaders and also its union workers. Utilizing the Madres’ memory and her own broadcasting power, Hebe de Bonafini named and shamed the CGT leaders. At the same time, she called on the union workers to take over, mobilizing the grassroots of the labor movement and proclaiming the organization’s loyalty to them. Through their vertical power, Hebe de Bonafini and the Asociación can pressure the union’s hierarchical leaders to meet their demands and mobilize the base of grassroots workers.

### *Trabajadoras Somos Todas; We are All Working Women*

As the Asociación aligns itself with the *compañeros* and the *trabajadores*, Ni Una Menos follows its lead in allying with the working-class: the movement identifies itself with the *trabajadoras*, working women. Thus, Ni Una Menos likewise takes up working-class struggles,

but it does so through a gendered perspective. While the Asociación implements its hierarchical structure to threaten union's hierarchies and inspire grassroots activism in the *trabajadores*, Ni Una Menos utilizes its horizontal structure to give *trabajadoras*, working women, the space to mobilize against exclusion and exploitation.

Along with the annual marches against gender violence, Ni Una Menos calls on activists to participate in the National Women's Strike and the International Women's Strike under the slogan "*Trabajadoras Somos Todas*," or "We are All Working Women" ("Trabajadoras somos todas"). Like the Asociación's embodiment of the worker, Ni Una Menos re-conceptualizes the idea of the female worker. Everyone is the "working woman," thus all participants of Ni Una Menos must fight for women's rights and working women's rights, as they are the same.

The movement highlights the exclusion of women from union work: Ni Una Menos states that, historically, women's union experience has been "[isolated]... from other political practices" ("*Trabajadoras somos todas*"). Women have been cut off from union work and thus have been isolated from the political power that it holds in Argentina. The movement emphasizes the use of the "*paro*" or the strike as the form in which the activists organize themselves. It claims that it has "made the word [strike] theirs" by having it include "all forms of work realized by women" as they complete a "triple workday" ("*Trabajadoras somos todas*"). The triple workday is a reference to women's experience as workers, mothers, and activists.

By appropriating the term strike, Ni Una Menos suggests that in the past, strikes have been controlled by male-dominated unions. The movement's ability to utilize the term and place it within a gendered context allows it to focus on women's specific exclusion to union power: their experience as mothers, activists, and working women, including informal or domestic employees. While the Asociación focuses on mobilizing the *trabajadores* in unions, through the

strike Ni Una Menos creates the space for working women and all women to mobilize in a space that was previously restricted to them.

The movement also recognizes a need to combine women's union work and activism with that of the CGT. Unlike the Asociación that chose a combative politics with the CGT, Ni Una Menos opted to collaborate with its leaders. In 2017, Ni Una Menos released a statement that Pablo Moyano, a CGT leader, expressed support for the movement by calling on its members to present themselves at one of Ni Una Menos' strikes ("Respuestas políticas a reclamos políticos. El 8 de marzo #NosotrasParamos").

While the CGT, as a federal labor union with immense power in Argentina, historically excluded women from its functions ("Trabajadoras somos todas"), Ni Una Menos deliberately published this statement. In this statement, the movement insisted that its demands not be "excluded or made invisible" ("Respuestas políticas a reclamos políticos. El 8 de marzo #NosotrasParamos"). By receiving and publicizing the CGT's support, Ni Una Menos advances its agenda and that of working women. In the face of the Argentine public, the movement recognized Argentina's history of excluding working women and demanded that it end. If the CGT is willing to support Ni Una Menos, it too must adhere to and work toward the values of the movement, placing the position of the working woman in one of power.

This kind of collaboration with union leaders emulates the Línea Fundadora's commitment to working within the democratic system. Although the Línea Fundadora does not utilize a working-class framework, the organization favors dialogue with the government to advance its agenda (Redacción Perfil 2011). Likewise, Ni Una Menos has chosen to work with union leaders, instead of taking the combative approach of the Asociación. The movement's decision to collaborate and not combat the heads of unions allowed it to empower working

women in union spaces while also demanding that these spaces commit to advancing women's rights.

## **V. Conclusion**

All three groups, the Línea Fundadora, the Asociación, and Ni Una Menos, structure their organizations to reflect their specific political agendas. On the one hand, the Línea Fundadora's emphasis on democracy within its organizations reflects its work within the democratic political system, a less combative form of politics that is also reflective of its upper-class profile. On the other hand, the Asociación's alternative vertical and thus hierarchical structure aligns with its socialization of maternity, in which Hebe de Bonafini's position as the matriarchal President allows for the dissemination of knowledge and guidance to collective grassroots activists. This guidance is based on the idea that grassroots activism must first be mobilized and later organized, following the Madres' tradition.

Ni Una Menos has done just that: the movement mobilized online and then later organized as a march against gender violence. The Asociación's focus on a familial, vertical structure allowed for the rise of Ni Una Menos' grassroots work. Yet rather than following the model of the Asociación, which organized by creating a vertical structure, Ni Una Menos maintains a horizontal structure throughout its activism, emphasizing the voices of the masses to reflect its dedication to diversity. Although Ni Una Menos emulates the Línea Fundadora's horizontal structure, it also takes into account the interests of the masses and not that of the few. As the victims of gender violence, women are given the voice to shape the movement as the conversation grows in society.

Through their action on the home front, both of the Madres organizations also emblemized the politics of the human body. It is a space to display what had happened to the bodies of the *desaparecidos*. The embodiment of politics thus was a form of activism by making the *desaparecidos* present, demanding justice for their disappearances. For the Línea Fundadora, it is a space to commemorate their existence. For the Asociación, the action of embodying politics is a way to actualize the presence and thus ideals of their children and justify the organization's revolutionary work toward a more equitable Argentina. Ni Una Menos acquired both approaches of commemoration and embodiment of revolutionary ideals. Through its activism, the movement commemorates *desaparecida* activists while also embodying their politics to consolidate the fight against the violence of the disappearances and that of gender violence.

For the original Madres, *poner el cuerpo* and putting their body on the front lines meant antagonizing the repressive regime of the junta. Expressing life over death allowed them to denounce the junta through their mere presence. While the Madres' movement politicized the necessity of *poner el cuerpo*, Ni Una Menos utilizes this method to ensure autonomy and collectivity. Connecting their movement to that of the *desaparecidas* and women activists of the past, participants can make their bodies a space for commemoration. As women's bodies are dismantled and taken over by the government, Ni Una Menos' activists take back power by expressing their volition over their bodies in the face of the state, embodying the politics of the *desaparecidas* and their own movement.

The Asociación's vertical structure also allows it to incorporate the grassroots labor movement into its struggle. The organization's commitment to the working-class *compañeros* embodies their children's plight as workers and commemorates the leftist values of the

*desaparecidos*. The organization can then combat the very forces, the CGT leaders, that assisted in the disappearances of their children.

Yet this traditional working-class framework left working women out of the picture and powerless in union work. Therefore, although Ni Una Menos follows the Asociación's lead in incorporating class struggles and economic justice into its demands, the younger movement insists that gender analysis is critical. It emphasizes that women's rights are also working women's rights through its use of strikes as methods of activism. Because it could publicly recognize the CGT as an ally for women's rights, Ni Una Menos could advance working women's rights by publicly denouncing the history of their exclusion, while also empowering them in the union domain. This activism has given working women a space to mobilize that was previously limited to them and also ensured that their rights are fought for and respected by union leaders and members.



## Chapter Four: Activism Abroad

### I. Introduction

This chapter will focus on the international scale of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Ni Una Menos. Specifically, I will look at the international connections they fostered, as well as the movements they inspired across the globe. While the original Madres organization split in 1986, this chapter's timeline will primarily centralize around their work before the schism. The division between the Madres is critical when discussing their work in Argentina. In contrast, the Madres' activism abroad is more representative of their unity up until democratization. Because the Madres' international recognition was fostered in the years prior to democratization, throughout the chapter I will primarily be referring to the original Madres organization before 1986.

First, I will discuss the international actions taken by the Madres at the beginning of the dictatorship. This discussion includes the Madres' contacts with international organizations and foreign governments and their failure to protect the Madres and Argentine citizens. I will analyze how the Madres instead gained international recognition and thus protection through foreign journalists. The Madres' ability to disseminate information allowed them to birth support groups across the world that financially stabilized them and assisted them in officially organizing themselves within Argentina. I will argue that through these journalists and support groups, the Madres were able to form an international human rights network based on mutual assistance that legitimized their organization.

This chapter will then consider Ni Una Menos' rise as a viral, international movement. I will argue that Ni Una Menos relied on the Madres' human rights network built on international grassroots activism. As a product of the Madres, Ni Una Menos today plays the role of both the

foreign journalists and support groups in the 1970s and '80s by creating a space for and legitimizing smaller, more vulnerable movements with similar aims. Also, by forming ties with other movements, Ni Una Menos strengthens and works within an international feminist network that mirrors the Madres' international human rights framework for activism.

I will then examine the international movements that sprung up as a result of these groups' actions. I will analyze the Madres organization's ability to be replicated in the wake of democratization in Latin America by other mothers looking for their children who were also disappeared. Furthermore, I will look at the organization's actions to multiply its specific form of activism centered around independence throughout the region. Then, I will look at its use of the universality of motherhood as a socialized identity that inspired other mothers in varying times and spaces to also fight for social rights. Through their international recognition, the Madres were able to validate their human rights discourse as mothers and thus legitimize the rise of other movements in which kinship and social rights take a central role.

Finally, I will contextualize Ni Una Menos' work in an online space, one that was previously not available to the Madres. The online world allowed the movement to take part in a regional conversation on femicide and gender violence that previously existed but under different contexts. Then, I will argue that Ni Una Menos broke language and regional barriers, and thus was reproduced in an international context. Unlike the Madres' focus on motherhood, Ni Una Menos directs its attention toward gendered contexts within each country. The movement's ability to move from an online to offline space allowed it to maximize its agenda and connect it to that of other grassroots movements working against structural, patriarchal violence. Through its international feminist network, the movement produces a collective human and social rights discourse with gender as an analytic to worldwide structural violence.

## II. International Human Rights Network

During the dictatorship, the Madres approached the international community, heads of state and non-governmental organizations alike, for assistance in the search for the *desaparecidos*. At the time, their efforts aided in their international recognition that allowed for a certain level of protection even under the repressive state of Argentina. Yet this international recognition would not have been possible without the presence of foreign journalists and the growth of the Madres' support groups worldwide that sustained the Madres financially by backing their social causes on an international scale. As they produced international grassroots activism, the Madres built an international human rights network that legitimized their human rights discourse.

As a viral, online movement, Ni Una Menos quickly gained international recognition. Unlike the Madres, Ni Una Menos had the tools and space for its message to become viral without the backing of the international community. Through Twitter and other online spaces, Ni Una Menos created a space to broadcast its message and reach thousands of people. The movement formed a collective network that operates like the Madres' grassroots activists: the support groups and foreign journalists. Ni Una Menos' international feminist network allows it to communicate with its activists, and to protect other movements in their struggle against all types of structural violence on a global scale.

### *International Silence; Global Support Groups*

The Madres were almost completely alone in their fight for truth and justice during the days of the dictatorship. While national media outlets refused to give them an audience, the Madres had to turn to the international community for help in finding their missing children.

Azucena Villafor De Vincenti, the founding member of the Madres, directed the others to write to Amnesty International and the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (Bouvard 1994: 68).

Yet their efforts were futile: although the Commission came to Argentina and published a report on the growing disappearances in 1979, the junta rejected the conclusion and continued its reign of terror (Bouvard 1994: 33). The Argentine representative to the United Nations Gabriel Martínez also made sure that Argentina would not be named in a UN report denouncing the disappearances in Latin America (Bouvard 1994: 87). At the same time, he discredited Amnesty International and made “important allies” in his crusade against human rights organizations (Bouvard 1994: 85). While the Madres reached out to the leading international organizations of human rights, they were met with silence from the international community. The number of disappearances continued to grow; these international bodies were powerless on Argentine soil. Because of Martínez's work in the UN and with the international community, NGOs and IGOs could not freeze international aid to Argentina (Bouvard 1994: 85). They were also unable to protect the Madres: Azucena herself was abducted and disappeared on December 10, 1977 (Bouvard 1994: 77). Without international recognition, the Madres were left vulnerable to the junta's violence.

With the threat of being disappeared looming over them, the Madres continued their struggle. During the World Cup in 1978 held in Argentina, while national media outlets focused on the soccer matches, the Norwegian journalist Frits Jelle Barend approached the Madres at the Plaza (Moore 2018). Wearing their white *pañuelos*, they demanded information on their children's whereabouts:

[The junta] says that the Argentines abroad are giving a false image of Argentina. We, who are Argentine, who live in Argentina, can assure you that there are thousands and

thousands of homes suffering from so much pain, so much anguish, so much desperation, pain, and sadness, because [the junta] will not tell us where our children are. We do not know anything about them... we don't know where else to turn to. Consulates, embassies, ministries, churches, everywhere has shut its doors. That is why we beg of you; you are our last hope. Please help us. (Parque de la memoria 2018).

As the junta portrayed one image of Argentina to the world, the Madres were given the space to demonstrate the contrasting reality of what was happening in the country. Through this broadcast, they denounced the junta's actions to the world and appealed to the universality of motherhood: it was Argentine "homes" that were suffering, countering the junta's 'subversion' narrative. The Norwegian journalist was their "last hope" as "consulates, embassies," and international organizations alike turned their backs to their pleas. While Argentine journalists ignored the Madres, the only journalists that would give them airtime were foreign (Bouvard 1994: 82). The journalist stayed with them after the World Cup had ended and propagated their activism throughout Europe (Bauso 2019). Although there was heavily armed military seen in the video, the Madres remained untouched; police officers left the scene "to avoid a major scandal" (Bauso 2019). The presence of foreign journalists proved vital in protecting the Madres.

The Madres' appeal to foreign journalists finally gave them the international recognition they needed. The broadcast caught the attention of the Dutch prime minister's wife, who created the Support Group for the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina (SAAM), made up of female "professionals, writers, executives, politicians, and housewives" (Bouvard 1994: 86). The formation of a support group abroad quickly spread the word, and soon other support groups formed in Sweden, France, and Italy (Taylor 1997: 187).

In 2000, when speaking of SAAM, Hebe de Bonafini claimed that the Madres were able to "birth another child" ("2000- Historia de las Madres"). The Madres understood their international human rights network as an extension of their socialized kinship; thus, the Madres

produced the support groups' international grassroots activism. As the Madres became known throughout their world for their work, the "junta was too concerned with its image to risk the adverse publicity an assassination would provoke" (Bouvard 1994: 89). Like the presence of foreign journalists, these support groups provided the Madres the safety to continue to demand for the *desaparecidos*.

These groups did more than raise international recognition for the Madres. They sent them a check to establish an office, and financially supported the Madres' trips around the world (Bouvard 1994: 89, 97). Because of this support, the Madres were able to travel and were heralded worldwide for their work. They met with "US senators, congressmen, and State Department officials... journalists and human rights groups," and the UN (Bouvard 1994: 87). The Madres presented themselves with a "simple statement:" "We are the Mothers of the disappeared from Buenos Aires, Argentina, and we are coming to discuss human rights" (Bouvard 1994: 87). This statement confirmed their existence as an organization and legitimized their work as human rights activists. When Alfonsín assumed the presidency under a new democratic government, it was the Madres who were treated as "heads of state" (Bouvard 1994: 123) when given an audience with international leaders. Their treatment abroad was a reflection of the power their human rights discourse had garnered in their international recognition.

It was the foreign journalists, not the international organizations or foreign governments, that gave the Madres the time and space they needed to denounce the junta's actions to a global audience. The journalists helped protect the Madres and broadcast their message across the world. This recognition allowed them to spawn SAAM and other support groups that financially stabilized the group, allowing for their politics to be institutionalized in a formal organization. Because of these grassroots efforts, even in the face of repression, they became known

worldwide for their human rights efforts. The Madres were able to “birth” these support groups and thus advocate for the *desaparecidos* and human rights abroad, creating an international human rights network that legitimized their human rights discourse.

### *#NiUnaMenos Worldwide*

Beginning in an online space, Ni Una Menos rapidly gained the international recognition that comes with ‘going viral.’ When Marcela Ojeda tweeted “*NOS ESTÁN MATANDO*” (‘THEY ARE KILLING US’), she did not expect the tweet to circulate (Annunziata et al. 2016: 48). What happened afterward was a series of conversations between female journalists with “many followers” including several who were “very influential” (Annunziata et al. 2016: 49). As journalists, these women had broadcasting power, enough so that they could capitalize on the spread of the slogan. While the Madres had to take initiative to carve out space for themselves in the international arena, Ni Una Menos was birthed into an already interconnected space.

Soon after, “recognized journalists, political activists, artists” and Argentine politicians chimed into the Twitter conversation (Annunziata et al. 2016: 49). Twitter, as an online space, gave these recognized journalists the power to transmit the slogan to thousands. As one tweet popped up after the other, the pressure was on for influential people to recognize it as well. Thus, the slogan went viral: as mobilization ensued, so did the power of the Ni Una Menos movement. On Twitter, the official Ni Una Menos account currently has thousands of followers to whom the movement can spread its message against gender violence worldwide (“@niunamenos\_”). This Twitter page and the movement’s website are utilized by its leaders to spread manifestos, planned marches, and general information to the public.

These online websites are spaces in which the Ni Una Menos movement spreads its message and that of other women’s movements around the globe. Ni Una Menos utilizes its

online presence to inform followers of other international demonstrations, promoting the international human rights grassroots work that the Madres legitimized. In 2019, Ni Una Menos extended its support to the “Fights [in the Amazon] of more than 130 *pueblos* that came out in the First Indigenous Women’s March of Brazil to denounce the increase of deforestation” under the “terrorist-extractivist-patriarchal government of Bolsonaro” (“Territorio: nuestro cuerpo, nuestro espíritu’ Declaración en apoyo y solidaridad con las comunidades de la Amazonía”). Utilizing its broadcasting power, Ni Una Menos connected the movement’s struggle to that of the indigenous communities in the Amazon.

Although it is a movement centered around gender violence, Ni Una Menos’ support of the First Indigenous Women’s March of Brazil exemplifies international solidarity among women’s movements. By publicizing this information to its thousands of followers, Ni Una Menos can expand its diverse base of activists and increase the international recognition of a lesser-known movement. Like the Madres’ foreign journalists in the 1970s and ‘80s, Ni Una Menos creates the space for the international recognition and legitimization of other movements. Yet unlike the Madres’ network that functions within itself, Ni Una Menos operates within a wider system that connects feminism to international human rights struggles.

At the same time, the group denounced the Bolsonaro government, and in doing so connected the concepts of state violence, extractive policies, and the patriarchal system (“Territorio: nuestro cuerpo, nuestro espíritu’ Declaración en apoyo y solidaridad con las comunidades de la Amazonía”). While the Madres formed their own international human rights network, Ni Una Menos expands on it to form an international feminist framework that promotes the movement’s struggle and that of others.



Communicating this framework to its thousands of activists, the movement also builds protection for other movements like the First Indigenous Women's March of Brazil. Through its statement, Ni Una Menos communicates that the world is watching, thus cautioning the government of Bolsonaro if it chooses to repress such action (“Territorio: nuestro cuerpo, nuestro espíritu’ Declaración en apoyo y solidaridad con las comunidades de la Amazonía”). While the foreign journalists from the 1970s and ‘80s protected the Madres through their physical attendance, Ni Una Menos capitalizes on its online presence. The movement’s position as a significant witness to other women’s movements warns of the consequences of repression.

The movement also called on other “global feminist organizations to demonstrate and demand” that the “necessary measures are taken to stop this fire” (“Territorio: nuestro cuerpo, nuestro espíritu’ Declaración en apoyo y solidaridad con las comunidades de la Amazonía”). The network of “global feminist organizations” functions like the Madres’ international network, in which mutual aid and encouragement allow these grassroots movements to expand their agenda and promote an equitable future free of all kinds of violence that uphold one another’s existence. The Madres’ international network of human rights birthed new grassroots activism in the form of support groups. Ni Una Menos’ functions within this framework of international grassroots activism, yet with gender as an analytic to establish an international feminist network that legitimizes women’s rights internationally.

### **III. International Inspirations**

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo legitimized their organization and discourse on a global scale through their human rights network. They created the identity of the politicized and socialized mother that could be expanded in the wake of democratization for other Madres’

groups looking for their children. The Madres spread their specific kind of activism, knowledge, and methods with the international recognition and power they had accumulated. Because the Madres promoted their idea of socialized maternity, their activism could be replicated in other movements related to women's communities and households through the universality of motherhood. Thus, the Madres enabled and legitimized a kinship structure of human and social rights on an international scale.

As the number of Madres groups continues to grow around the world, so too do the replications of the Ni Una Menos movement. While the discussion on gender violence in Latin America was not a new one, Ni Una Menos' online presence allowed for the discussion to reach an expansive global level. Because of the slogan's flexibility, Ni Una Menos broke language and regional barriers. Its online to offline characteristics allowed the movement's agenda to adapt to cultural contexts. Ni Una Menos connects struggles and forms the international space and network for agendas to be replicated and expanded throughout the world. As the Madres legitimized their kinship discourse based on social rights, Ni Una Menos utilizes a collective social and human rights discourse that incorporates women's rights internationally.

### *Madres Groups around the Globe*

The Madres were one of the first and only movements that stood up to the junta's violence in public spaces. Their courageous activism inspired Madres movements across the region. As democratization spread throughout Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, Madres groups sprang up in response to the thousands of disappearances in their own countries. These organizations from "Chile, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras" came to the Madres in Buenos Aires to learn "organizational and political skills" and march with them (Bouvard 1994: 237-238). El Salvador's CoMadres and Guatemala's CONAVIGUA widows

(Howe 2006: 47) stand as representations of the Madres' reach and leadership in the wake of Latin American dictatorships.

These organizations also “draw the bulk of their membership from the working and peasant classes” (Bouvard 1994: 238). As the largest Madres group, the Asociación also holds the international public voice for the Madres organizations (Redacción Perfil 2011). The Asociación's focus on a working-class framework is replicated in other Madres movements, taking on the issues that plague society's most vulnerable populations. Ideologically, the Madres' influence politicizes motherhood internationally. On an activism scale, they are able to disseminate their methods of independent collective action to be reproduced throughout the region. The Madres also impose their form of activism on the other Madres organizations that fail to follow their tradition as an independent and combative group. They are not afraid to publicly criticize other Madres organizations for their ties to the Catholic Church and political parties (Bouvard 1994: 227) if they are not following their tradition as an independent and combative group. Because of their international prominence, the group assumes the responsibility to instruct on political action, following their tradition based on independence.

Through its insistence on socialized motherhood, the Madres' movement could be replicated in varying times and spaces. In 1989, “four hundred Mexican American mothers” in Los Angeles wore “white shawls” and held “weekly marches and letter-writing” campaigns to “block the construction of a state prison and an incinerator in an area near dozens of schools” (Bouvard 1994: 237). Through the use of white shawls, the Mexican American mothers form a direct connection with the Madres' famous *pañuelos*, building on the Madres' legacy and prominence. Seeing an issue such as that of the creation of a state prison and an incinerator near schools as one of the “household and community” (Bouvard 1994: 237), the Mexican American

mothers took the Madres' example of socialized motherhood to extend their politics as well. The Madres' international recognition, all the way to Los Angeles, legitimized its human rights discourse focused on social rights.

Although the original Madres' movement began as a dedication to the *desaparecidos*, the expansion of its agenda to include social rights allowed other Madres movements across the globe to do the same. The Madres created the identity of the politicized and socialized mother that could be replicated internationally, thus legitimizing their human rights discourse based on socialized kinship and social rights on a global scale.

#### *Ni Una Menos: A Virtual, International Movement*

Ni Una Menos' global reach contributed to its spread in virtue of its online presence. Earlier movements against femicide such as *#VivasNosQueremos* in Mexico (Rovetto 2015: 16) were already carving the way for the movement in Argentina. The conversation against gender violence was not a new one; rather, Ni Una Menos was a part of a larger, regional discussion on femicide.

While Ni Una Menos' original demands focused on domestic changes to protect against gender violence (Annunziata et al. 2016: 53), it made waves across the region. Through social media, the hashtag could be seen in Colombia, Mexico, and Spain (Annunziata et al. 2016: 60). Foreign media outlets "picked up the slogan:" hashtags like "*#EverydaySexism*" and "*#YesAllWomen*" were seen across Twitter (Annunziata et al. 2016: 60). Because Ni Una Menos began on Twitter as a hashtag, it could be replicated in multiple languages. This contributed to the spread of the movement in other countries that surpassed its original intentions in Argentina; gender violence was now a conversation that went beyond language barriers and regional borders.

The first Ni Una Menos manifestations that brought together hundreds of thousands of Argentines on June 3, 2015 were not the only ones. The day of the first mobilizations was accompanied by “more than 600,000 mentions” on Twitter, and the “hashtag was a ‘trending topic’ globally” (Annunziata et al. 2016: 61). Because of its spread, there were simultaneous marches in “Chile and Uruguay” (Annunziata et al. 2016: 60), and later they were replicated in “Spain, Poland, Italy, and the United States” (Castro 2018: 21). Ni Una Menos, because of its slogan and virtual platform, started a conversation on gender violence that could be duplicated throughout the world. Furthermore, its transition from an online to offline space helped mobilize activists to demand that their own countries follow the Argentine example in the fight against gender violence.

In its internationalism, Ni Una Menos focuses on activism apart from its June 3<sup>rd</sup> marches held annually across the globe. The movement believes in strikes as methods to bring “to stage the economic trauma of patriarchal violence” (“¿Cómo se fue tejiendo el Paro Internacional de Mujeres 8M?”). This tool unites working women and connects multiple struggles against all types of structural violence worldwide. On October 19, 2017, Ni Una Menos called for an international women’s strike, the first in Argentine and Latin American history (“¿Cómo se fue tejiendo el Paro Internacional de Mujeres 8M?”). Because the hashtag *#NiUnaMenos* had already made waves in Latin America, mobilizations spread across the continent.

These strikes were not the same everywhere; each one had its demands pertaining to their countries’ “patriarchal violence” (“¿Cómo se fue tejiendo el Paro Internacional de Mujeres 8M?”). Like the Madres’ groups around the world, the demands for these strikes were contextualized to different countries’ situations. Moreover, Ni Una Menos created an online, interactive map of the demonstrations across the globe that could be accessed by any activist

wanting to participate (“Mapa 8M”). It was no longer a virtual movement, rather it became one that brought activists “body to body on the streets” (“¿Cómo se fue tejiendo el Paro Internacional de Mujeres 8M?”). The Madres’ focus on kinship allowed similar groups to focus on social rights as human rights. Like the Madres’ discourse, Ni Una Menos’ work also validated social rights through its promotion of international strikes. Ni Una Menos was able to formulate a human rights discourse that had a gendered perspective on social rights, thus legitimizing its discourse centered around women’s rights globally.

This kind of international feminism allowed for the transition from an online to offline space on a global scale. Gender violence in all its forms, specific to each country’s issues, was being denounced. Connecting struggles across regions and continents, Ni Una Menos was able to create a network of international feminism that simultaneously works to create debates and promote solidarity among movements across the world. Through this network, the movement builds on the Madres’ human and social rights discourse to include women’s rights on an international scale.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The Madres’ global actions as they reached out to organizations and governments were futile in protecting them against the junta’s violence. Only the presence of foreign journalists gave them the protection and thus the ability to voice their demands to the rest of the world. This activism was essential in them establishing support groups across the world based on grassroots activism that funded their organization and established them as international and diplomatic actors, constituting an international human rights network centered around their discourse of kinship and social rights.

The international grassroots work in supporting the Madres is evident in the Ni Una Menos movement, which utilizes its broadcasting power to protect and voice the movements of other, more marginalized communities across the globe. While the Madres utilized their network to promote their own human rights discourse, Ni Una Menos created an international feminist network that functions to lend mutual support, solidarity, and security against worldwide structural violence.

The Madres' politicization of motherhood inspired other mothers in their search for their *desaparecidos* during Latin American democratization. They produced and also worked with these groups to spread their collective action independent of government and religious interference. The Madres' international activism contributed to the spread of the universality of motherhood as a political tool that was later absorbed and reproduced by other mothers in diverse contexts under the banner of social rights.

Ni Una Menos' ability to work through its website and Twitter is a new political skill that allowed the movement to become a part of regional discussions on gender violence. The movement utilized its ability to become viral to break language barriers and regional borders and to spread its message globally. This internationalism led to the creation of similar movements worldwide that were able to contextualize structural violence and mobilize on the streets. Ni Una Menos ties its struggle to that of others and creates a network of international movements working against structural violence, from an online to offline space. Through this transition, Ni Una Menos works within the international human rights discourse based on social rights that the Madres legitimized, while also taking a gendered perspective to combat patriarchal violence across the world. For Ni Una Menos, international social rights necessitate and include women's rights.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

Argentine women's collective action illustrates the intersections of gender, class, and activism as points of interest, in which these concepts are combined to compose an effective response to structural violence. The case studies of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the Ni Una Menos movement demonstrate key affiliations in women's collective action through the relationship between an established human rights organization and a budding feminist grassroots movement.

The Madres' long-term mobilization outcomes and use of kinship politics have been criticized by previous literature (Gandsman 2012, Howe 2006, Taylor 1997). Nevertheless, Ni Una Menos deliberately named the Madres as its predecessors ("8 Ejes para el Acto 8 M ¿Por qué paramos?"). The movement's relationship to the Madres has yet to be analyzed by scholarship. This thesis has set to determine the Madres' capacity for long-term mobilization outcomes, as demonstrated by their role in the political construction of Ni Una Menos.

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo constructed an imagined community based on kinship, ideology, and collective action. Their development of this space birthed new collective activism in the form of Ni Una Menos. Through the Madres' socialized kinship model, Ni Una Menos inherited the Madres' ideology and activism. The movement utilizes the Madres' structures of domestic and international activism it inherited with gender as a critical lens to oppose structural and patriarchal forms of violence in Argentina and around the world. The Madres built democratic citizenship models that conceived Ni Una Menos; thus, the Madres formed lasting activism against structural violence by cultivating a new feminist movement.



## I. Summary of Findings

The Madres established their form of maternal activism that socialized maternity and politicized their kinship structures. Their incorporation of social rights into their activism is an extension of their socialized and revolutionized motherhood to the *desaparecidos* and society's most vulnerable communities. These kinship networks were built by the Madres' affective ties with each other, and with their imagined community. The Madres politicized these affective ties by utilizing them to advance their human rights activism.

The Madres' socialized kinship structure paved the way for the emergence of Ni Una Menos. Through the Madres' imagined community, Ni Una Menos applies its affective ties to the older movement. The movement's connection to the Madres is more than emotional; these affiliations were politicized by the Madres and thus are utilized politically in the Ni Una Menos movement. Ni Una Menos appropriates the Madres' symbols, creating a direct link between its activism and that of the Madres. At the same time, the movement employs its gender analysis by adapting these symbols to its fight against gender violence and toward the legalization of abortion.

Also, within this shared imagined community, Ni Una Menos inherited the Madres' ideological understanding of structural violence, in which they criticize and actively confront the complicity of the Church and neoliberal institutions. The persistence of the structural violence from the dictatorship under which the Madres formed to the 2010s when Ni Una Menos emerged, is inherently tied to patriarchal systems that exploit the use of violence. Ni Una Menos sees a direct link between its activism and that of the *desaparecidas*, the women who were disappeared during the dictatorship for revolutionary activism. Through the Madres' kinship

networks, Ni Una Menos takes on the Madres' activism and that of the *desaparecidas*, thus advancing the concept of structural violence to include patriarchal violence.

The Madres' activism in Argentina is emblematic of the different organizational structures within the two factions. The 1986 schism of the original Madres was caused by their organizational preferences, rooted in differing conceptions of democratic values and socio-economic backgrounds of its members. The Línea Fundadora believes a horizontal structure and dialogue-oriented activism is necessary to promote democracy. In contrast, the Asociación functions through a hierarchical and vertical structure with a combative approach. This organization's work is focused outside of the political system with grassroots activists, as these Madres believe that Argentina's democracy is fraudulent. The Asociación provides an alternative hierarchical and vertical structure that emulates a family. With Hebe de Bonafini as the President and the matriarchal figure, the Asociación utilizes its vertical structure to inspire grassroots activism. Its focus is not on Argentine democratic structures; rather, it intends to mobilize and then organize grassroots activists to revolutionize these structures.

Ni Una Menos inherited both of the organizations' activism regarding the movement's work in Argentina. Ni Una Menos adopted the Línea Fundadora's focus on horizontalism. While the Línea Fundadora uses a horizontal approach to emulate democratic processes, Ni Una Menos utilizes its horizontal structure to incorporate all victims of gender violence into the movement. In doing so, Ni Una Menos' production of knowledge comes from its broad base of activists, allowing the movement to absorb new issues of gender violence that arise in Argentina. At the same time, Ni Una Menos is a product of the Asociación's vertical structure. As the Asociación utilized its verticality and hierarchy to emulate a familial structure, it passed down its specific form of activism. Although Ni Una Menos does not take a vertical approach, it follows in the

Asociación's tradition of mobilizing, then organizing. Because Ni Una Menos' first mobilizations necessitated a horizontal structure, its organization reflects the movement's dedication to collective grassroots activism as the answer against gender violence.

Through the combination of these organizational structures, Ni Una Menos incorporates both of the Madres organizations' use of body politics into its activism. The Línea Fundadora's commemorative practices function to remind society of their children that were disappeared during the dictatorship. Ni Una Menos utilizes commemoration to also remember the disappeared yet takes a gendered approach by reminding society of the *desaparecidas*, the women activists that were lost during the dictatorship. The Asociación's Madres also commemorate the *desaparecidos* through their bodies by embodying their revolutionary politics and continuing their activism. By undertaking the *desaparecidas*' struggle against structural violence and connecting it to that of their fight, Ni Una Menos' activists embody the politics of the *desaparecidas* to continue their activism.

The Madres utilized and politicized *poner el cuerpo* as a political tool to represent life and to counter state-sponsored terrorism. Ni Una Menos acquired this tactic to emphasize the power of collective life. As the state asserts its power over the female body, Ni Una Menos activists utilize their collective bodies through *poner el cuerpo* to subvert the state's power and reclaim their autonomy.

In its domestic activism, the Asociación also passed down its working-class perspective to Ni Una Menos. Because of the Asociación's historically combative relationship with union leaders, the organization works to promote grassroots activism in union workers. These Madres embody the *trabajadores*, the working-class activists that were disappeared during the dictatorship. Through its vertical structure, the Asociación pressures union leaders and passes

down its mobilization to workers. Ni Una Menos also embodies the working-class perspective, yet through the *trabajadoras*, working women. The movement reclaims the strike as its form of activism, giving working women a space to demonstrate that historically excluded them. Yet in its approach toward union leaders, Ni Una Menos takes the Línea Fundadora's dialogue-focused method. In doing so, Ni Una Menos can have its demands met by union leaders, while also empowering working women in union spaces.

Outside of Argentina, the Madres built international recognition for themselves. While the Argentine media and foreign governments turned their backs to the Madres, foreign journalists gave them the space to denounce the junta's actions. Through their presence around the Madres, the journalists protected them from the junta's violence. As they gained international recognition, the Madres birthed support groups throughout Europe. These support groups financed the Madres' trips around the world and an office in Argentina. With assistance from these support groups and foreign journalists, the Madres formed an international network dedicated to human rights based on the Madres' work against the junta's terrorism.

Ni Una Menos developed an international feminist network built on the Madres' human rights activism and network. The movement became viral and gained international recognition through Twitter and other forms of social media. Ni Una Menos utilizes this recognition and power like the foreign journalists operated: the movement provides its online presence as support for women's movement worldwide. Ni Una Menos' encouragement of other, more vulnerable movements allows it to expand the concept of women's rights as human rights. Functioning as a support group, Ni Una Menos brings awareness to other groups and thus connects its struggles with that of human rights. It also warns foreign governments of the consequences if they choose to repress against activists. Tying together women's movements across the globe, Ni Una Menos

constructs a broader international feminist network dedicated to women's rights that builds on the strategies of the human rights network of support groups and foreign journalists that the Madres conceived.

The Madres and the Ni Una Menos movement also inspired activism abroad. In the wake of democratization and the fall of Latin American dictatorships, mothers across the region took the Madres' inspiration and created their own groups looking for their disappeared children. The Madres' socialization and politicization of motherhood allowed for its replication in varying times and spaces. The Madres built an established human rights discourse from their work with the *desaparecidos* that they were able to make global and use to shape future maternal activism.

Ni Una Menos builds on the Madres' human rights discourse with gender as an analytic. The movement's online format allows for its replication across the world, bringing femicide to the forefront of the international public agenda. The hashtag *#NiUnaMenos* breaks language and regional barriers and thus can be repeated worldwide. Ni Una Menos utilizes its recognition to call international strikes. These strikes allow activists to confront the issues pertinent to their respective countries. The movement built on the Madres' international discourse of human rights by connecting social rights and women's rights. Through its international feminist network, Ni Una Menos utilizes human rights to legitimize both social rights and women's rights and to confront patriarchal violence around the world.

The evidence presented in this thesis supports the argument that the Madres were able to create long-term mobilization outcomes by birthing a new, feminist movement in Ni Una Menos. With their imagined community, the Madres were able to create lasting kinship structures in collective action that established the space to pass on their ideology and activism. Through this space, Ni Una Menos draws a direct lineage between women activists from the past and present.

Connecting struggles across time and space, the movement revitalizes the Madres' political construction with gender as an analytical tool to view structured violence.

The Madres' organizational structures built a democratic citizenship framework for Ni Una Menos to establish its own horizontal grassroots movement. The movement inherited the Madres' use of body politics and working-class frameworks to advance its agenda against all forms of gender violence. Ni Una Menos is a product of the Madres' activism and thus utilized the Madres' international political construction to create an international feminist movement based on the Madres' human rights discourse. By birthing Ni Una Menos and passing on their ideology and activism, the Madres' organizations created a durable mobilization framework and an effective democratic citizenship model that could be appropriated and revitalized to combat patriarchal violence.

## **II. Possible Future Points of Interests**

Many of the Madres are older, in their 70s and 80s, and suffer from "ill health" (Bouvard 2010: 4). As the Madres come up against old age, further research should look into how the Madres conceived or inspired grassroots work in other movements, such as labor organizations. The Asociación has also been under scrutiny for misuse of funds for one of its programs, *Sueños Compartidos*, that was related to the Kirchner government (Briggs 2012). The organization was accused of embezzlement in 2008 after receiving "between \$150 and \$300 million [USD] in public funding" for the construction of low-income housing (Briggs 2012). Once a widely respected human rights movement, the Asociación was discredited by the scandal. In the wake of the corruption scandal, many organizations distanced themselves from the Asociación (Briggs 2012). Additional research may look into the scandal's effects on the Madres' kinship and

relationship with Ni Una Menos. This research could reveal interesting arguments regarding the strength of these relationships, and solidarity between the movements.

This research has not determined the level at which Ni Una Menos influenced the Madres. Many of the Madres, especially those of the Asociación, have historically rejected feminism because of its association with upper-class women's interests (Bouvard 1994: 191). As Ni Una Menos imposes the Asociación's working-class perspective, a point of interest would be to study the shifting opinion of the Madres toward feminism with the introduction of Ni Una Menos. Ni Una Menos is a new feminist movement that utilizes gender and class differences to examine the concept of gender violence ('Trabajadoras somos todas'). Because Ni Una Menos is a product of the Madres, it would be of interest for future researchers to delve into the Madres' attitude toward the movement and its analysis of class.

This thesis sought to demonstrate the Madres' long-lasting effects on collective action through the rise of Ni Una Menos. However, questions of effectiveness have yet to be answered. More specifically, this thesis did not look into how effective these kinship mobilization structures have been on legislation and change within the government. Ni Una Menos inherited the Madres' ideology and activism, yet this thesis did not examine whether their kinship activism is a practical tool to transform the Argentine political system. Future analyses of these cases may want to consider the lasting political effects of this mobilization outside of collective action networks. Prospective research may also explore the influence this inheritance has had on public attitudes toward collective action. Exploring the public's response to the Madres' and Ni Una Menos' work may bring new insight into the effectiveness of kinship and collective action.

While this work was nearing completion, the economic crisis in Argentina was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Argentina is no stranger to economic crises; the

country has experienced a rollercoaster of defaults and was just beginning to recover from the last one when COVID-19 hit (Yanakiew 2020). The country instated a mandatory lockdown, affecting many informal laborers who are unable to receive government aid (Yanakiew 2020). This mandatory lockdown disproportionately affects women in informal employment, such as domestic employees and sex workers. At the same time, there have been six recorded femicides within ten days since the lockdown began, with a total of eighty-six recorded in 2020 (Alcoba 2020). As femicides “primarily occur in... homes,” this lockdown “puts [women] at risk” (Alcoba 2020).

Because of the economic crises Argentina faces, it would be insightful for future researchers to examine the collective action responses to COVID-19 in comparison to other crises. This research could include a comparison between responses of human rights groups like the Madres and feminist movements like Ni Una Menos as they function within the same imagined community. At a time when collective action seems implausible without *poner el cuerpo*, physical mobilization, there is an opportunity for researchers to look at developing mobilization strategies. Perhaps Argentine women’s collective action can surpass the lockdown by superseding physical spaces. Ni Una Menos has proven the power of online movements. With its annual June 3<sup>rd</sup> march coming up, Ni Una Menos and its ability to acclimate to changing spaces could reveal the future of collective action, with a past rooted in the Madres’ work for human rights.



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