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## Mothers Against Democracy: Hebe de Bonafini's Rhetorical Strategies of Resistance, 1988-2003

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MOTHERS AGAINST DEMOCRACY: HEBE DE BONAFINI'S RHETORICAL  
STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE, 1988-2003

by

Shirley J. Oakley

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Communication

The University of Memphis

December 2010

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## ABSTRACT

Oakley, Shirley J. Ph.D. The University of Memphis. December 2010. Mothers Against Democracy: Hebe de Bonafini's Rhetorical Strategies of Resistance, 1988-2003. Major Professor: Dr. Sandra Sarkela.

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo was once a small group of grieving mothers in Buenos Aires who sought solace during a dictatorship that began in 1976. As their resistance developed, they grew into a social and political organization whose purpose is to keep the memory of their children alive and to generate justice in Argentina and worldwide. Their leader, Hebe de Bonafini, is atypical because there was no oratorical tradition for her to follow; she created one. Throughout the thirty-four years of the mothers' movement's existence, Bonafini's rhetoric has changed and has taken a new shape.

The permanent disappearance of the Madres' loved ones led to the strategies that allowed the Madres a voice during a dictatorship that silenced an entire country. A year into Argentina's military dictatorship, Bonafini framed her arguments around the injustices of the dictatorship, yet as the Madres' organization transformed to political activism and their movement split, her rhetoric became more aggressive and revolutionary. Even though democracy was established in 1983, Bonafini's resistance discourse continued for twenty-three more years, until 2006, as the Madres sustained their resistance to the Argentine government.

This study is about social movements, women, mothers, and power. The focus is five of Bonafini's major speeches, chronologically dated from 1988 to 2003, analyzed to identify her rhetorical instruments of power. A close reading provides a better

understanding of the speech texts which identify three consistent themes: motherhood metaphors, denial of agency and the use of prosopopoeia, and scapegoating.

Strategies that generate revolution are important to study. Bonafini began to speak during a brutal dictatorship and continued to use her oratorical skills to resist the elected government after the dictatorship ended. Her rise to fame was dependent upon her rhetorical strategies; hence, a study of how Bonafini motivates and influences others by the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols is central to understanding more about this rare social movement phenomenon. A critique of Bonafini's speeches given during the late stage of this accidental yet calculated mothers' movement will provide us with much insight into their particularly persistent resistance.

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## TERMS AND TIMELINE

### *Terms*

**Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo:** Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. A human rights organization that began in 1977; their goal is to find the desaparecidos' children, many who were born in captivity and adopted by military families.

**Azuncena Villaflor de Vincenti:** Founding leader of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

**CELS:** Center for Legal and Social Studies

**CONADEP:** Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (National Commission on the Disappeared). President Raúl Alfonsín created the commission in 1983; the commission's investigation of human rights abuses culminated in a report titled "Nunca Más" (Never Again).

**Detenido-desaparecido:** Victims of state terrorism who were disappeared.

**ERP:** Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Army). A guerilla group that emerged in Argentina around 1970.

**ESMA:** *Escuela de Suboficiales de Mecánica de la Armada* (Naval Mechanics School).

**Hebe Pastor de Bonafini:** Leader of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and President of the Asociación de Madres in Buenos Aires.

**Madres de Plaza de Mayo:** Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. A human rights organization created in 1977 by the mothers of the desaparecidos. Every Thursday afternoon at 3:30pm, they march around the Plaza de Mayo in downtown Buenos Aires. They split into two factions in 1986: Asociación de Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Línea Fundadora.

**Montoneros:** A nationalist far-left Peronist guerrilla group that emerged around 1970 in Argentina.

**Plaza de Mayo:** Main plaza in Buenos Aires that sits in front of the Casa Rosado (presidential government pink house).

**Universidad Popular de Madres:** Mothers Popular University established by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo to train revolutionaries.

## *Timeline*

- 1976 On March 24, 1976, military coup ousted President Isabel Perón.
- 1977 On April 30, 1977, mothers who are searching for their children meet for the first time in public at the Plaza de Mayo.
- In December 1977, nine mothers were detained by a paramilitary squad, including Azucena Villaflor Vincenti, the Madres' first leader, and two other founding mothers, Esther Careaga and María Eugenia Bianco; three more mothers were taken two days later and none were ever heard from nor seen again.
- 1978 The 1978 World Soccer Cup took place in Buenos Aires (won by Argentina at the peak of the repression).
- In 1978-1979, the Madres made their first trip to other countries, beginning with the United States and Rome.
- 1979 In August 22, 1979, twenty women, in front of a public notary, signed the founding document of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo creating the Asociación de Madres. Hebe de Bonafini was elected president; Maria Adela Antokoletz was elected as vice president.
- 1980 Madres de Plaza de Mayo began publishing their bulletin.
- 1981 On December 10 and 11, the Madres held their first 24-hour "March of Resistance." These resistance marches continued until January 2006 (25 years).
- 1982 On March 26, the military junta invaded the Malvinas/Falklands. On June 20, the Malvinas/Falklands War ended.
- 1983 Fall of the dictatorship and installation of democracy. On Oct. 30, Raúl Alfonsín from the Radical Party was elected president.

- 1984 CONADEP's report, *Nunca Mas* (Never Again) is published reporting the details of the disappeared.
- 1986 In January, the Madres group splintered and the Madres Línea Fundadora (Founding Line of Mothers) was created.
- 1988 Hebe de Bonafini delivered her "Tribute to Che in the Swiss House" speech.
- 1992 All members of the Madres' Association were awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.
- 1995 Hebe de Bonafini delivered her ESMA speech.
- 1999 Hebe de Bonafini delivered her UNESCO Prize for Peace Education Award speech.
- Also in 1999, the Madres opened the Universidad Popular in Buenos Aires, establishing their literary café and bookstore and the Casa de Madres, all just two blocks from the Argentine Congress.
- 2002 Hebe de Bonafini delivered her "I am the Other" speech.
- 2003 Hebe de Bonafini delivered her "We Believe in Revolution; We Believe in and Love Socialism" speech.
- 2006 Madres' last march of resistance against the Argentine democratic government, although they still march around the Plaza de Mayo each Thursday at 3:30 p.m.
- 2010 On June 3, Hebe de Bonafini received an honorary doctorate, *Honoris Causa* (causes of honor) from the Universidad Nacional Experimental del Estado Yaracuy (UNEY), in Venezuela.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In Buenos Aires in 1998, a group of mothers appeared onstage with English musician Sting as he performed the song that immortalizes the mothers: “They Dance Alone.” He sings: “They’re dancing with the missing; they’re dancing with the dead,” as the mothers announce their children’s names to an audience of thousands.<sup>1</sup>

The mothers are the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, and they are famous. Once a small group of grieving mothers who sought solace during a dictatorship, they have developed into a social and political organization whose purpose is to keep the memory of their children alive and to generate justice in Argentina and worldwide. They operate an independent university, bookstore library, and literary café, promoting revolutionary ideas for which many of their children once fought. La Casa de Madres, two blocks from the Argentine Congress, has been visited by dignitaries like Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez and Brazil’s Lula. The longtime leader of the Madres is Hebe de Bonafini, who maintains a relationship with Argentine President Christina Fernández de Kirchner; Bonafini has also cultivated close ties to Iran’s Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.<sup>2</sup>

Bonafini and the Madres are the models for Latin American mothers’ social movements. Bonafini is atypical because there was no oratorical tradition for her to follow; she has created one. She did not follow a traditional pattern in her rise to fame, and is not characteristic of a celebrity culture of power even though she patterns her

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<sup>1</sup> “They Dance Alone” (Gueca Solo) by Sting first appeared on the 1987 album and *CD Nothing Like the Sun*, A&M Label, released in the United Kingdom. For more info see Sting’s discography: <http://www.sting.com/discog>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see Michael Casey’s *Che’s Afterlife: The Legacy of an Image*, p. 143.

revolution in the shadow of Che Guevara. She and the Madres have secured a place on the public platform and their motherhood has taken permanent residence in the public sphere of Argentina's most important political territory, the Plaza de Mayo. Throughout the thirty-four years of the movement's existence, her mother's voice has changed and her rhetoric has taken a new shape.

She began to speak during a brutal dictatorship and continued to use her oratorical skills to resist the democratically elected government after the dictatorship ended. Called a madwoman by the dictatorship, others listened to her and still listen to her for a simple reason: they identify with her pain and they identify with her quest for justice, not just in Argentina, but worldwide. Her rhetoric, during and after the dictatorship, was motivating. It offered hope to an audience that previously had none. Her rise to fame was dependent upon her rhetorical strategies, whether intended or not. Hence, a study of how Bonafini motivates and influences others, how she uses verbal and nonverbal symbols, is central to understanding more about this rare social movement phenomenon.

### *Purpose and Significance of the Study*

The Madres' movement is unique and unpredictable. A year into Argentina's military dictatorship, Bonafini, framed her arguments around the injustices of the dictatorship, yet as the Madres' organization transformed to political activism and their movement split her rhetoric became more aggressive and revolutionary. The permanent disappearance of the Madres' loved ones led to the strategies that allowed the Madres a voice during a dictatorship that silenced an entire country. Even after democracy was



established, the resistance discourse continued. Bonafini's speeches demonstrate her rhetorical strategies for the Madres' continued resistance to the Argentine government.

The focus of my study is five of Bonafini's major speeches, chronologically dated from 1988 to 2003, analyzed to identify patterns of resistance. More specifically, the purpose of my research is to answer this question: What rhetorical strategies did Bonafini use to resist the new democratic government after the fall of the dictatorship? In order to understand the context of these speeches, my study begins with a review of Argentina's history and gender ideology and the events that led to the rise and split of the Madres' movement. I summarize Bonafini's life and then look at who may have influenced her leadership style. Then, five speeches are presented for analysis followed by a discussion of strategies.

There are several questions worth asking, and one in particular is this: Why did the mothers keep protesting when the dictatorship was gone? The obvious answer is that they wanted those responsible brought to trial; they wanted justice. However, as the movement continued, their cause shifted to revolution. They resisted democracy; resisted the idea of a government in power. They resisted authority. Their goal was to find their disappeared loved ones, but when they realized their loved ones would never return, they developed methods to keep their children's memories and voices alive. Because many of their children were tied to the idea of revolution, the children were victims of the government; their children's voices now provide the authority for a fight for social change and human rights. Another important question is this: Why did people keep listening to Bonafini after the dictatorship ended? Many speculate, but Bonafini's

speeches give us better insight into this group of mothers whose unity provided a platform for the development of their powerful political organization.

There is much significance in this particular resistance movement. Social movements rarely occur in a non-democratic state. So rare are these occurrences that in European, U.S. and South American history, there are but two countries that saw the rise of social movements during a military dictatorship: Argentina and Uruguay (Tilly, *Social Movements* 62). Furthermore, it is highly uncommon for a movement to continue to mobilize after a government's transition to democracy, yet the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, organized in 1977, continued to resist the Argentine government for twenty-three years, from 1983 to 2006, even after democracy was installed in Argentina.

This study is about social movements, women, mothers, and power. As women in a machismo society, these women could not have accomplished what they have. As mothers, they have accomplished much. As a social movement, they fought a violent dictatorship and a new democratic government. How did they do it in a country that silenced everyone during a dictatorship then devalued women during democracy?

There are many reasons to study social movements. For this one, it is important to understand strategies that generate revolution. We can acquire a better understanding of women's power, and of mothers' power in a male-dominated society. We can strive to break cultural barriers by adding to our knowledge of Latin American movements and rhetoric. We can try to get a better understanding of why, as Casey puts it, Bonafini attacks the democracy that she and the Madres helped to restore in 1983 (143). We can gain an understanding of how the Madres took possession of Argentina's most important political space: the Plaza de Mayo. We can gain a better understanding of how mothers

move past their mourning to live in a country that has no properly marked graves and the absence of bodies to mourn.

Bonafini is a powerful orator. She speaks the unspeakable horrors of losing tortured children. She utilizes her mother power, denying her own agency and giving voice to her deceased revolutionary children. She takes the story of exploitation and tells it over and over again, exposing the disguises of repression, and her repetition, when observed closely and closely analyzed, reveals purposeful messages that might otherwise go unheard/unseen (Hart 321). Also, Bonafini is using gendered rhetoric, but her rhetoric can be also be categorized as mothers' rhetoric. She gains and keeps her authority by her position as a mother; as a mother, she exudes many assumptions about the power of women and mothers in a public realm.

An analysis of selected speeches will also add to our knowledge by a better understanding of the type of movement this is. There is much controversy about the type of movement the mothers were and the type of movement they have become. Some claim that they are a peace movement, but a close analysis of Bonafini's speeches show that her discourse is not peaceful. Some claim that because the mothers are women, they exert their power from a gender position. Others believe that the mothers are a movement for institutional reform, a type of movement that wants to change the foundation of institutions, and in this case, Bonafini's rhetoric tells us that she wants social reform, but what else does she want? Is this a mother's movement, and is this the rhetoric of mothers, the rhetoric of confrontation, or all of it? We can add to this assessment by asking if the rhetoric of mothers is also a rhetoric of revenge or restitution.

Bonafini welds her scarf as an instrument of power (Casey 142). It is a major symbol that denotes peace and motherhood. It once identified the mothers to each other, but has developed into their trademark; it is their major symbol. An analysis of Bonafini's speeches will illustrate that there are other rhetorical instruments of power found within her speeches, significant elements that must be addressed. One is her continued use of the motherhood metaphor. Her speeches are dependent upon this metaphor and I could say that this metaphor keeps the mothers in a position of oppression as their children take possession of their lives. Another important element is the denial of agency and Bonafini's repeated use of prosopopoeia. This is a tricky situation as the deceased children speak through the mothers and some have likened Bonafini to a ventriloquist. She denies her own agency and gives it to her children, yet this action does not lessen her own ethos, it amplifies it. Her children's silence, alive and in death, is broken by this action. She fights the dictatorship's silencing then hands her voice over to her children. This is a sacrificial act that we see repeated in her speeches.

Bonafini also repeatedly blames capitalism for Argentina's and the world's problems. By positing motherhood against evil, the mothers established a durable brand early on, one that fits easily into the narrative of the left (Casey 143). Her distaste for the U.S. is clear; her problem-solving solution is socialism. A study of this type can show us how this progression occurs from distrust to government to distrust of democracy and then a distrust of capitalism.

The study is also important because Bonafini's position of mother allows her the opportunity to speak out and to develop persuasive revolutionary discourse.

Revolutionary discourse is attractive to audiences who are on the left and especially when

Che Guevara becomes the ideological foundation for the Madres' work. This strategy may serve to broaden their popularity; it also creates ethos for their children. The Madres call themselves the mothers of all children, so as universal motherhood expands what might we expect of the younger generation?

It is important to identify Bonafini's rhetorical strategies not only because the mothers are unique, but also because Bonafini has been the president of the association and leader of the Madres since 1977. An analysis of Bonafini's speeches will give us a better understanding of her leadership. The mothers claim that they all have equal leadership, yet Bonafini is president of the Madres' Association and has become an international celebrity. Does her type of leadership follow traditionally held ideas, or does she establish a different style? A reason for studying the speeches of the leaders of social movements is to create a better understanding of how leaders project their desires to the audience. Some may also learn what works in a movement and what doesn't or to make predictions (Bowers et al. 141).

Study of the rhetoric of this movement is important because it became a movement with a slogan that could never happen—the demand for the disappeared to be returned alive (*aparación con vida*). This goal could not be obtained, yet the movement continued. The dictatorship ended, yet the movement continued. The mothers established their own university, literary café, bookstore, yet the movement continued. A shift in the goals of the movement, the cry for justice and position of universal motherhood allowed the movement to continue; the business of motherhood continued even after the resistance to the government ceased in 2006.

In summary, learning more about this social movement gives us a better understanding of the often underrepresented study of Latin American social movements and protest rhetoric, an underrepresentation that seems odd given the number of protests in Latin America. A critique of Bonafini's speeches given during the late stage of this accidental yet calculated movement will provide us with much insight into this particularly persistent mothers' movement. For, in spite of Bonafini's aggressive and often radical rants, she still has a high status and international reputation. Her aggression is forgiven because she exudes the persona of a grieving mother, wearing her scarf, and demanding justice. In the end, it could be that's all she's ever wanted.

### *Literature Review*

Although much has been written about social movements, scholarship on the rhetoric of social movements in Latin America is limited, and even more limited is the scholarship about women's revolutionary rhetoric in Argentina. Many studies have identified various aspects of the Madres' movement and have offered historical information and interviews with the Madres' members, but most of these studies do not identify the Madres' rhetorical strategies found in Bonafini's speeches. This review describes research in pertinent areas of study that form the foundation for this study.

### History and Rhetoric of the Madres' Movement

Literature describing the history of the Madres' movement is abundant. The most quoted book in Madre literature is Jo Fisher's *Mothers of the Disappeared* (1989). Fisher offers a detailed history of the military coup and the rise of the Madres' movement. This

is a major work of Madre interviews, including many interviews with Bonafini. Fisher also published *Out of the Shadows: Women, Resistance, and Politics in South America* (1993), another text of interviews which documents the military rule's atrocities and reveals accounts of women and mothers who organized protests to find their disappeared family members. Patricia Steiner's *Hebe's Story: The Inspiring Rise and Dismaying Evolution of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (2004) traces the Madre's history through Bonafini's memory. Steiner's viewpoint is that once a popular and well-respected faction of Argentine political consciousness, the Madres movement evolved then declined mainly because of Bonafini's shift in ideology and aggressive discourse. She sees Bonafini as a radical instigator who will not forget the past.

*Luchar Siempre: Las Marchas de la Resistencia, 1982-2006* (2007) is the most credible source for each of the marches of resistance, authored by the Madres' Universidad Popular secretary, Inés Vázquez and others. Also published by the Madres, Gabriel Bauducco's *Hebe: La Otra Mujer* (Hebe: The Other Woman), is a biography of Bonafini's life told through personal interviews. Hebe de Bonafini and Matilde Sánchez wrote an emotional essay "The Madwomen and the Plaza de Mayo" for Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo's *The Argentina Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (2002). The essays in this book teach the reader about the history and culture of Argentina, some of which is written in story form. Matilde Mellibovsky first published *Circle of Love over Death: Testimonies of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (1997) in Buenos Aires in 1990. She is one of the founders of the Madres whose daughter was disappeared in 1976. The book is composed of personal accounts of Madres' memories, including poems and quotations from their children.

Other secondary scholarship includes the work of Viviana Abreu Hernandez (2002) who believes that a historical transformation occurred with the Madres' movement beginning in 1977. Marguerite Guzman Bouvard (1994) uses the concepts of revolutionary motherhood to discuss the significance of the mothers' struggle. Bouvard, in contrast to Hernandez, suggests that the Madres have introduced a new model for human rights activity. Jadwiga Mooney in *Militant Motherhood Re-visited: Women's Participation and Political Power in Argentina and Chile* (2007) discusses the implications of militant motherhood in Argentina and Chile, comparing leadership on opposite sides of the political spectrum. She points out that the mobilization of mothers did not focus on gender equity or feminist goals. She claims that anti-Allende women in Chile demanded military intervention, while the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina requested an end to human rights abuses by the military regime. Mooney believes that the studies of Chile and Argentina reveal that militant mothers' immediate and long-term success lay in the nature of their resistance and their skillful use of tradition. Perhaps she is overstating the role of gender, but many have studied the Madres from this point of view, asking why women mobilize (Navarro, 1989; Guzman 1994; Arditti 1999). Valeria Fabj's work, "Motherhood as a Political Voice: The Rhetoric of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo" looks at the Madres' symbols within a frame of *marianismo*; she gives close attention to the Madres' transition from the private to public realm by upholding their positions as mothers.



## Social Movement Studies

Charles Tilly is a standard reference and a significant contributor to the study of social movements. In *Social Movements, 1768-2004*, Tilly makes the claim that democratization is a factor in all social movements—that social movements preceded democratic transitions (62), yet he admits there are exceptions in South America and Europe. He believes that democratization promotes the formation of social movements and limits the range of feasible and collective action and that social movements assert popular sovereignty. Claims may evolve and vary historically, and the social movement, as an invented institution, could disappear or mutate into some quite different form of politics (12-14). This is particularly useful for distinguishing the atypical nature of the Madres' movement. Tilly also points out that democratization promotes the formation of social movements, but by no means do all social movements advocate or promote democracy. This distinction is crucial. He cautions against the illusion that social movements themselves promote democracy by analytically separating movement claims from movement consequences. For example, a pro-democracy movement may lead to anti-democratic consequences (62).

Sidney Tarrow (1994) in *Power in Movement: Collective Action, Social Movements and Politics* discusses the idea that social movements are formed when ordinary people join forces in confrontation with elites, authorities, and opponents (1994, 2). Tarrow reminds us that although movements almost always conceive of themselves as outside and opposed to institutions, collective action inserts them into complex policy networks, and thus, within the reach of the state. Therefore, if nothing else, movements enunciate demands in terms of frames of meaning that are comprehensible to a wider

society; they use forms of collective action drawn from an existing repertoire, and they develop types of organizations which often mimic the organization they oppose (25).

### Latin American Social Movements

*The Struggles for Social Rights in Latin America* (2003), edited by Susan Eckstein and Timothy Wickham-Crowley and *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Culture* (1998) by Sonia Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar provide insight into Latin American social movements and political strategies, including the emergence of Latin America's left and women's roles in new democracies. These sources are especially useful in understanding histories and the role of activism in Latin America, including current human rights activism and cultural politics of social movements. Also useful are Dagnino Arturo and Sonia Alvarez' edited collection of essays in *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy* (1992).

Lorraine de Volo's *Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs* (2001) offers an exploration of revolutionary rhetoric in interviews with the Mothers of Matagalpa in Nicaragua who promoted a maternal collective identity during their participation in the Nicaraguan Revolution—one in which women's participation was probably greater than in any other recent revolution (with the exception of Vietnam). Her work is extensive as she interviews mothers who fought for the Revolution. Radcliffe and Westwood's essay collection, *'ViVa': Women and Popular Protest in Latin America* (1993) show the variations of Latin American women and protests. There is a balance of political and popular protest... issues relating to gender, class, and race/ethnicity in Latin America—necessary topics for analyzing the context of the Madres' movements. Francesca Miller's

*Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice* (1991) is an invaluable for my research into Latin American women's cultural roles from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Miller identifies topics of women and education, and feminism and social motherhood to analyze revolutions and counter-revolutions.

### Rhetoric of Social Movements

The scope of scholarship on the rhetoric of social movements in North America is broad. In our field of rhetoric, classic essays by Herbert Simons and Leland Griffin provide theoretical foundations for the study of social movements. Leland Griffin's "A Dramatistic Theory of Social Movements" (1969) explains his approach to political drama and the moral striving for perfection and describes the rhetorical structure of a social movement. His "Anti-Masonic Movement" (1958) and the "Rhetorical Structure of the New Left" (1964) serve as models for movement studies. In "Requirements, Problems, and Strategies: A Theory of Persuasion for Social Movements" (1970), Simons defines moderate leadership strategies as peaceful and civil and militant leadership strategies as threatening, harassing, and intimidating. Simons claims that contemporary movements seem to require combinations of both militant and moderate strategies; his idea of militant seems synonymous with that of revolutionary (42).

The Madres movement has followed a pattern of transformation throughout its inception, maturation, splintering, and development stages. While their stages can be identified by traditional social movement scholarship, the Madres' leadership style does not fit into traditionally held and accepted assumptions that describe social movement leaders. This signals an opportunity to study the Madres' resistance movement for a

better understanding of how a social movement leadership changes, yet does not follow traditional variables for leadership, foundations from which most studies of social movements are formed. Robert Cathcart's work, *Movements: Confrontations as Rhetorical Form*" (1978), on confrontation rhetoric and the agon seem more fitting if we are to categorize Bonafini's rhetoric within a traditional rhetorical movement frame.

Browne and Morris (2006) offer a collection of essays in the *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest*. They begin with the foundational studies of Simons and Griffin then add contemporary movements such as abortion, gay rights, and so on. They do not advance beyond U.S. movements. A collection such as this is useful, however, for extracting ideas for how protest rhetoric is developed and accepted among movement scholars.

There are limited resources concerned specifically with analysis of the Madres' rhetorical strategies and symbols. Karen Foss and Kathy Domenici (2001) analyze the Madres' white scarf as synecdoche in "Haunting Argentina." This notion, however, excludes the underlying politically symbolic nature of the scarf, for example, the hierarchical implication of *who* wears one and why. In my own interview with Madre Elsa Manzotti in Buenos Aires in 2008, she discussed the importance of the scarf today, saying that they now only give them to people they choose—only those people whom the Madres allow to have one can wear one.

Maria de Carmen Feijoó, author of "The Challenge of Constructing Civilian Peace: Women and Democracy in Argentina" (1994), believes that the Madres showed a capacity for innovation (I'll call it invention) in the cultural dimension of *doing* politics (78). She discussed their originality which was evident in their development of new

forms of mobilization, such as the walk around the plaza; giving old symbols new meanings (e.g., the white headscarves). Her research includes identifying symbols as strategies, and is helpful in supporting my own claim.

Diana Taylor in *Disappearing Acts* labels the Madres' strategies as performative and communicative (186). She points out that because the Madres' first protest in the Plaza was on a Saturday and there weren't many to watch, the Madres changed their protests to Thursday to guarantee a spectacle, turning their bodies into walking billboards (187). However, Taylor does not address the point that the Madres were only safe when they were demonstrating. Many were harassed when they returned home each Thursday.

Fernando Bosco (2006) in "The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Three Decades of Human Rights' Activism: Embeddedness, Emotions, and Social Movements" examines the role of emotions (pathos) in the Madres' activism and explains how embeddedness of actors in social networks is consistent with current relational views of spatiality in human geography. His research indicates that the Madres' emotion is key to the sustained activism that extends across Argentina. This article is consistent with much of how the Madres have been understood: as emotional activists. The problem with this conclusion is the accusation that the Madres' sense of strategy is reduced in significance by their emotional states, which are put at the forefront of their movement.

Studies of revolutionary rhetoric include *The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control* by John Bowers and Donovan Ochs (1992) which provides a framework for analysis of protest and responses. Andrea Rich and Arthur Smith in *Rhetoric of Revolution: Samuel Adams, Emma Goldman, and Malcolm X* (1979) give examples of the rhetoric of these three revolutionaries, and *The Rhetoric of Revolt* by Paul Brandes (1971) offers a

rhetorical analysis of Fidel Castro's revolutionary rhetoric, helpful in understanding the progression of the Madres' discourse.

This literature offers much information about the history of the Madres' movement, social movement studies, and information from authors who seek to understand more about this group of mothers. However, what's missing is a study of the leader's rhetorical strategies.

### *Speech Selections*

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo became a registered organization in 1977. Bonafini's rhetoric is documented in numerous interviews and speeches. She continues to give speeches to the audiences at the Plaza de Mayo each Thursday and continues to give speeches to audiences world-wide. Therefore, it is impossible to count or include all of her public discourse in this study. However, the five speeches I have chosen are significant and available to the public online in two languages: the Madres' website (in Spanish) and the UNESCO website (in English). I selected speeches that represent a chronological progression.

The dictatorship ended in 1983 with the election of Alfonsín, and the Madres' organization split in 1986. Slightly before and during those three years, Bonafini's rhetoric transformed from a militant style to revolutionary, as evidenced by her discourse in speeches and interviews. By 1988, her revolutionary rhetoric was in full force as she delivered a tribute to Che Guevara on the anniversary of his death. I chose this speech, "Tribute to Che in the Swiss House," given in the Buenos Aires province, because it was the first speech presented on the Madres' website. It has significance because of the

Madres' open admiration for Guevara, an admiration that grew into the foundation for their university. Guevara is a major player in the Madres' movement for socialism.

The second text I chose is a speech Bonafini delivered in 1995 in front of the ESMA (naval school), near Buenos Aires: "I Call for Punishment!" The location of this speech is significant because the ESMA, now a museum, was the largest detention center during the dictatorship where thousands were tortured, killed, then dropped out of planes into the nearby Rio Plata; it is a memorial to death and the Madres are terminal mourners.

In 1999 the Madres were awarded the UNESCO prize for peace education. Bonafini's acceptance speech, already translated to English, is important in identifying her techniques for keeping her children in the forefront of her speaking. Given in Paris to an audience of dignitaries, the speech is a representation of the Madres' past and present combined.

By 2002, Argentina had seen its worst economic crisis; unemployment was at an all-time high and the picketers were in full force. Demands were being made on the democratic government and some of these were Bonafini's demands for justice. This next speech outlines the Madres as universal saviors and their philosophy, "I am the Other" and ties the Madres to many unexpected causes.

The fifth selection is a speech given at Moncada Barracks in Santiago, Cuba, in 2003: "We Believe in Revolution; We Believe in and Love Socialism." This short speech sums up the Madres' intended goals, their beliefs, and their connection to Castro's Cuba, where a "no happier people" exist.

## *Methodology*

“A way of seeing is also a way of not seeing” (Burke 49). When designing a method for which to analyze Bonafini’s (or anybody’s) speeches, we have to see what is not there in order to understand what is. Identifying arguments in Bonafini’s protest rhetoric is important in understanding her motivation and goals. She has them and uses some of them repeatedly, but for her confrontational rhetoric, we need to look elsewhere to fully understand her other strategies. I appreciate Griffin’s (1952) proposal, broadening the rhetorical critic’s traditional emphasis to discover patterns in the movement (1). Persuasion and argument are central to the rhetoric of a movement, but Foss, Foss and Griffin re-define rhetoric as “any kind of symbol use that functions in any realm” (7). This means we can look at symbols without assuming that their purpose is to persuade. Rhetoric becomes an invitation to understanding or “an offer to others to see our world the way we do, not in the hope that they will change, but that they will understand” (Foss et al. 5). Effectiveness of a speech becomes less of an issue as knowing what meaning is produced.

If I stand in judgment of Bonafini’s discourse, I want to know the effects of these speeches on her audience, which may or may not be impossible to ascertain, but we can gain a better overall understanding of what her message is by a close reading of the texts. We might ask, how effective is she in establishing revolution in Buenos Aires, or in recruiting young people to carry on the revolutionary work of Che Guevara, but with the emphasis solely on effectiveness, success, and outcomes, we are missing the opportunity to study the text for a better understanding. For example, if we are concerned with comprehension and appreciation of her speech, we could make our goal one that



identifies symbols, assess that symbol in terms of context, and offer a better understanding of what Bonafini's rhetorical strategies entail. The emphasis is placed on the text itself and in this manner, the text, as Mike Leff (1992) puts it, becomes an art form and the artistic critic sees the text as art and wants to foster an appreciation in the reader (224).

To also foster a better understanding of this art form and symbols, the close reading becomes a valuable tool for analysis. Leff and Sachs explain that working from within the text, the critic proceeds to make inferences about what the work is designed to do, how it is designed to do it, and how well that design functions to structure and transmit meanings within the realm of public experiences (256). This idea differs but does not have to be polarized from traditional argument.

For the close reading, the text becomes the critical focus and "closer readers tend to conceptualize the text as powerful and extremely complex" (Jasinski 192). The term density acknowledges the wealth of materials that are packed in texts; they are "not empty shells or vessels full of discursive drivel but rather repositories that contain almost endless insights into the particulars of a situation" (qtd. in Jasinski 192). The text's action draws attention to its internal dynamics, and the closer reader searches for the various elements and forces that shape the text. It is important to note here that Leff and Sachs believed that a close reading does not have to isolate the texts from larger ideological and discursive formations. Instead, a close reading can provide a way of understanding the discursive mechanism through which ideologies do their cultural and political work (Jasinski 95).

The question repeated for this study is: What rhetorical strategies did Bonafini use after democracy was installed to keep the movement going? My interpretation of Bonafini's speeches will present a discussion for the understanding of the speech in regards to culture. These elements: argument, close reading, and culture form a platform for a better understanding of the speech texts. Furthermore, these methods of analysis present two goals for the critique: one is to see the effect on the audience, which may not be readily available given the location of the speech; and the other is to uncover the complexity of the messages in Bonafini's discourse by a close reading.

### *Culture and Translations*

While social movement theory has been well established in the United States, it may differ from those studies in Latin America. Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar (1998) emphasize the fact that in Latin America today all social movements enact a cultural politics; all social movements, collective identities, and strategies are inevitably bound up with culture (6). They believe that Latin American political cultures are greatly influenced by the U.S. studies, yet differ (9). This is surely due to the nature of ethnic differences, including the Spanish language. Thus, I will analyze Bonafini's speeches within the context of the Argentine culture and under the umbrella of her own personal culture.

Furthermore, the cultural meanings of the words or phrases in Bonafini's speeches are given particular place of importance for this study. Four of the five selected speech texts have been translated from Spanish to English. The first phase of this effort is accomplished with assistance of two professors of linguistics at CELE language institute

at the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo in Mendoza, Argentina. They have helped to provide explanations for slang and idioms, as well as culturally sensitive interpretations.

### *Preview of Chapters*

In the next chapter, “Rise, Dissent, and Split of the Madres’ Movement,” this historical context summarizes the beginning in 1930 to the rise of the Madres in 1977. In addition I discuss gender ideology as we see the Madres’ Association established as a legal organization, elevating their position as mothers to spokespersons for the disappeared. The founding mothers are kidnapped and Bonafini is chosen as a new leader. Chapter 3, “Hebe de Bonafini: Life and Leadership” I describe Bonafini’s life story and the impact of the disappearances of her sons. With the fall of the dictatorship and the death of her husband, Bonafini vows to continue the struggle forever. This chapter looks at those who may have influenced Bonafini’s leadership and the transformation of her discourse is also addressed.

Chapter 4, Speech 1: “Tribute to Che Guevara” given in 1988, begins the first of five speech chapters. These five speech chapters introduce the context, the analysis, and short summaries. Listed, they are: Chapter 5, Speech 2: “I Call for Punishment!” given in 1995; Chapter 6, Speech 3: Acceptance Speech, UNESCO Prize for Peace Education given in 1999; Chapter 7, Speech 4: “I am the Other” given in 2000; and Chapter 8, Speech 5: We Believe in Revolution; We Believe in and Love Socialism” given in 2003.

Chapter 9, Discussion of Rhetorical Strategies of Resistance is a summary of major strategies found in Bonafini’s discourse. In this chapter her motherhood metaphors, her denial of agency and the trope prosopopoeia, and the topic of scapegoating are

discussed. Her strategies give clarity to the goals of the movement and are tools for understanding women, mothers, power, and Latin American movement protest rhetoric. I conclude this work in Chapter 10 with a discussion of the impact of the Madres' movement.

## CHAPTER 2

### RISE, DISSENTION, AND SPLIT OF THE MADRES' MOVEMENT

My discussion of the historical context that preceded the rise of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina describes the extent of military control, the lack of civilian rule, and the traditional subordinated role of women in Latin America. More specifically, this chapter summarizes Argentina's history and gender ideology, the Madres' history up to the split of the movement, and the transformation of the Madres' movement. For the study of rhetoric, it is important to understand the context from which this movement arose and progressed, and how a group of mothers were able to create the necessary discourse to sustain the movement.

#### *Argentina's History and Gender Ideology, 1930-1976*<sup>1</sup>

In the beginning of the twentieth century, Argentina had been one of the richest countries in the world. By 1950, it had severe economic and political problems stemming from the depression of 1929. During this time period, Argentina had a 50-year cycle of military dictatorships with only brief periods of civilian governments. Most of the military leaders, inclined to fascism, patterned their rule from European totalitarian dictators. In Argentina, between 1955 and 1973, there were only seven years of civilian rule.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this dissertation, the historical content has come from the following sources unless otherwise noted: Fisher, Jo. *Mothers of the Disappeared*; Nouzeilles, Gabriela and Montaldo, Graciela, eds. *The Argentine Reader: History*, Eckstein, Susan, and Wickham-Crowley, Timothy P., eds. *Struggles for Social Rights in Latin America*; Escobar, Arturo, and Alvarez, Sonia E., eds. *The Making of Social movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy*; and Miller, Francesca. *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice*.

In 1930, a military coup overthrew the Radical Party and the Peronist Party developed. There was a conflict between the industrialist class and the agriculture oligarchy (which had most of the political power) and it was in this context that in 1946, Juan Domingo Perón was elected president. In 1955, a coup ousted Perón and he went into exile; the Peronist party was banned for two decades. Between the ousting of Perón in 1955 and his return from exile in 1973, urban insurgent organizations emerged: Two Marxist-Maoist-Guevarrist-oriented groups, and four populist-nationalist Peronist-oriented groups eventually dispersed or joined either the ERP (Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo) or the Peronist Montoneros (Gillespie 215).

In the United States, the fear of communism during post WWII had given rise to the encouragement of a new role for the Latin American military (Kaiser 4). Throughout Latin America the military contained units specially trained in counterinsurgency techniques that had been instituted, with the aid of the United States, in the wake of the Cuban Revolution<sup>2</sup> and the Cuban-based attempts to export revolution (Miller 1-2). Military regimes throughout South America began taking power and inflicting a state-sponsored terrorism against citizens; this terrorism included kidnappings, torture, death squad use, illegal imprisonment, and disappearances ; the military governments systematically violated human rights by arresting thousands of people without formal

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<sup>2</sup> According to Miller, after the Cuban Revolution aligned itself with the USSR in 1961, Latin American leaders joined with the North American politicians and strategists in supporting multilateral development schemes that included large-scale sales and transfers of military supplies as well as plans for building schools and health clinics and providing loans for small businesses. The plans were formalized in the Alliance for Progress, inaugurated at Punta del Este, Uruguay, at the Special Meeting of the Inter-American Economic and Social Council in 1961 (148). Miller adds that Cuba was the only Latin American nation denied participation in the Alliance; Ché Guevara, in his capacity as Cuban minister of industry, went to Uruguay and used the occasion to denounce North American imperialist designs. On that occasion Ché was “outshone” by the presence of the equally youthful and charismatic John F. Kennedy (148).

charges, holding them in secret location; most were raped, tortured, and murdered (Miller 1-2).

By 1973, Perón had returned from exile and was elected president; his wife Isabel was his vice president. By this time, there were two main guerilla groups, the ERP and the Montoneros, a far left Peronist group whose idol was Juan Perón's second wife, Eva. Juan Perón died in 1974 and Isabel became president. Isabel lacked the ability to contain the guerilla groups and the internal fighting that was tearing the Peronist movement apart. Sections of the trade unions had withdrawn their traditional support for the Peronist Party and the annual inflation rate was approaching 500%, with projections that by the end of the year it would reach 100%; there was a huge public sector deficit and the balance of payments was in a desperate condition (Fisher, *Mothers* 12). As the country stood within days of defaulting on payments of the international debt which amounted to more than \$8 billion, the International Monetary Fund refused the government further credits (qtd. in Fisher, *Mothers* 12). The Montoneros were driven underground and adopted a stand of armed resistance against the ruling Peronists (Fisher, 1989, 11). Factions within the government responded to the dissent inside and outside its ranks by creating the Argentine Anti-communist Alliance, the brutal and notorious Triple A (Fisher, *Mothers* 12).

In addition, the government was unable to exercise any control over an economy crippled by inflation and deficits. On March 24, 1976, a military junta composed of three generals, Jorge Videla, Emilio Massera, and Ramón Agosti installed itself as the government of Argentina by staging a successful *coup d'état* against President Isabel

Perón with two objectives: to promote national economic development and to eradicate subversives (Steger 92).<sup>3</sup>

Within months, the military junta, headed by Videla, suspended Congress, appointed sympathetic judges, banned all political parties, canceled elections, censored the press, and dissolved hundreds of civil associations, and calling themselves “guardians of national values” the military regime waged a state terrorism against citizens who might oppose their rule, labeling them leftists, subversives, or terrorists (Steger 92).

The dictatorship used the term *desaparecidos* (disappeared) to refer to those who were conspicuously missing due to kidnappings. During the seven years of the military rule, the military generals were responsible for the illegal arrest, torture, and killing of roughly thirty-thousand or more people (Fisher, *Mothers* 70). This figure is generally accepted.

The generals claimed that leftist guerrillas were a threat, that communism was the power base of the guerrillas and the influence of the organized labor and the ideological delinquents—liberal and libertarians, socialists and social workers, and others who disturbed the generals’ sense of order (Anderson 12). Whole populations were suspect—university students and professors, anyone involved in Liberation Theology or social services, journalists, and intellectuals (Thornton 280). The majority of the disappeared were between the ages of twenty and thirty-five.<sup>4</sup>

The generals wanted to reconstruct Argentina by destroying in order to rebuild, so they called their administration the Process of National Reconstruction (this later became

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<sup>3</sup> The national security doctrine was also implemented in Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay.

<sup>4</sup> See CONADEP (Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas). Also, my research at the UK’s National Archives revealed that psychologists were major targets.



known as *proceso*). Videla assured the public that the nation would be governed by the values and morality of Christianity, patriotism and the family (Fisher, *Mothers* 12). The family had failed to raise obedient citizens and the new society that the military wanted to create would restore authority through a return to patriarchal order.

Women, in part, had become disobedient citizens. The roles and rights of women during this time period were tightly wrapped within a sexist ideology called machismo, a term that has roots in the indigenous cultures and the Spanish colonial church. Machismo emphasizes the superiority of the male and lessens the capabilities of women making the relationship one of domination and subordination. This role, which had come to be known as “natural,” designates women and mothers to their proper place in the home. These traditional ideas dominate the educational system and teachings of the Church and are disseminated at a popular level through contemporary literature, television and cinema. Women’s subordinate position in society has been supported by civil and family law which was strongly influenced by the Spanish legal system that stipulated the dominance of the husband over women and children. Women could not vote or hold public office in Argentina until 1947.

It was Juan Perón’s government of 1945-1955 that had offered women gains in some areas; however, the basic ideology of motherhood remained unchallenged. For example, Eva Perón had called on women to improve their positions and linked women’s struggle with the working class. She did not question the role of women as housewives and mothers. In addition, when the military seized power in 1955, it called for a return to Christian and family values, reinforcing traditional women’s roles aligned with the conservative elements of the Church (Fisher, *Mothers* 12).

While innocent citizens were being tortured and murdered by the military dictatorship in Argentina, women went into the streets in protest of the regime, establishing their claims of motherhood. The military, claiming to uphold family values, could neither support nor deny protection for the mothers who searched for their children. Whether it was a female consciousness, feminism, or the concept of *marianismo*, the idea of the sacred mother, or the image of the Virgin Mary, by the actions of the mothers leaving their private realms and demanding information about their children in a public realm, motherhood was becoming socialized. Socialized motherhood is a term that has been used by many who study the mothers, especially Marguerite Guzman Bouvard. What this means is that the mothers combine the private sphere with the public sphere for the public platform. Put another way, they take their motherhood to the streets and to the public. There is no mother group that preceded the Madres in Argentina; they were the model for other mother groups.

Mothers were coming out of the private realm into the public realm because of the state-sponsored violence. Eckstein and Crowley explain:

As hundreds of thousands of civilians lost their lives at military gunpoint, women took to the streets to protest the loss of their loved ones, despite the risks of publicly defying the regimes. The movements were defensive, to reestablish women's claims to the most fundamental of rights, that of motherhood.... (31)

In South America, women took the lead in the struggle against military dictatorships that arose in Chile (1973), Uruguay (1973), and Argentina (1976). Michelle Bonner notes that throughout Argentine history, women have been called to defend the nation and promote public morality with their role as representatives of the family (72).

The role of gender in the mothers' actions also played a part at this time. West and Zimmerman note that even when individuals or organizations are not purposefully

behaving in a gendered manner, they may be viewed through a gendered lens or evaluated against gendered expectations. In other words, the mothers may be evaluated according to their roles as women, not as exclusively as their roles as mothers. Acknowledging gender in addition to motherhood is important because, as Miller explains, equating womanhood with motherhood was a common strategy in totalitarian regimes; it had the effect of removing women from their particular historical and cultural context, making them subject to unchanging laws, here defined as raising children in the home within the order prescribed by the military government, and of alleviating and enduring the sacrifices demanded by the nation (212).

Linked to gender, feminism also played a role in the rise of mothers' movements.<sup>5</sup> Maxine Molyneux points out that the early 1970s had come to represent a breakthrough decade for feminism in South America; feminist organizations developed alongside more popular movements for basic needs (63). However, the feminist groups that had emerged in Argentina in the 1970s had dissolved after the military coup of 1976 (Feijóo 80).

Not surprisingly, feminist thought was seen as incompatible with the traditional values of the military regimes. The development of a feminist critique of the traditional social order was most vocal in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile, where the combination of advanced public education systems open to both sexes and the influx of European immigrants seeking better lives combined to produce a new class of educated, articulate women (Miller 68).

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<sup>5</sup> Whereas many of the early proponents of women's rights in Latin America were upper-class women, speaking out as individuals, it was female schoolteachers who formed the nucleus of the first women's groups to articulate what may be defined as a feminist critique of society, that is, to protest against the pervasive inequality of the sexes in legal status, access to education, and political and economic power (Miller 7).

Francesca Miller points out that equating womanhood with motherhood was a common strategy in totalitarian regimes (212). It had the effect of removing women from their particular historical and cultural context, making them subject to unchanging “laws,” here defined as raising children in the home within the order prescribed by the military government, and of “alleviating and enduring the sacrifices demanded by the nation” (Bonder 92). Miller explains that in the Chilean instance, the definition of women’s “natural” role has another, more pernicious purpose: women who criticize the regime, who oppose the state, who choose to move beyond the constrictions of women-only-as-mother, may be seen as “unnatural” (212). Thus, the “inhuman treatment meted out to women identified by the Pinochet regime as dissidents—the rape, torture, and murder of thousands of Chilean women, documented by testimony and human rights organizations—derives directly from and is justified by the regime’s definition of woman’s “natural” role (Miller 212).

The military regimes in Argentina, Uruguay, and to a lesser extent Brazil promoted a similar identification of mother with nation. It was in this atmosphere that the protest movements known as the mothers’ movements were formed (Miller 212).<sup>6</sup> There are significant patterns and parallels in the strategies of female protest and resistance in Argentina, Mexico, and Haiti that help to illuminate not only the history of women in these societies but also the broader workings of the societies. In each case the particular dissenting response of the women is rooted in the historical circumstances of her time and place, and in her understanding of her role as a woman, as dissent to the culture of fear in Latin American in the 1980s, to the murderous repression of the Mexican government in

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<sup>6</sup> The mothers’ movements were consciously constructed to appeal to an international audience in hopes of bringing their plight and the crimes of the military against the citizenry to light (Miller 212).

1968, to the brutal military occupation of Haiti in 1930. It is because of this, and not because of any intrinsic sexual characteristic, that the forms of the women's protest, the selected arenas and issues of debate, and the strategies of opposition employed are neither imitative or nor directly analogous to those employed by their male counterparts (Miller 11).

*Madres History up to the Split of the Movement, 1977 to 1986*

To bring order to Argentina in what the generals believed to be a mass of economic, social, and familial chaos, the dictatorship was kidnapping victims. Searching for information about their missing children and loved ones, mothers began meeting by chance outside of the Ministry of the Interior in Buenos Aires. When they realized that they were searching for the same answers, they began to meet secretly in churches and homes. The founding organizers of this group of mothers were Azuncena de Vincenti, Esther Careaga, and María Bianco.

On April 14, 1977, fourteen of the mothers met at the Plaza de Mayo in front of the government pink house and began a series of public demonstrations protesting the disappearances of their children, husbands, friends, and other relatives. They wore white scarves and silently walked counter-clockwise around the Plaza. Although demonstrations were illegal, the government's initial response was to ignore the mothers and to label them *las locas* (crazy women) who posed no threat to the regime.

Jo Fisher argues that the military government treated the mothers differently than they treated other groups (60). Because the mothers were not seen as a threat, the military assumed that random arrests would be enough to disband the protesters. Such treatment

was relatively mild considering the imprisonment and torture of students and other subversives occurring at the time. As one of the mothers explained,

They didn't destroy us immediately because they thought we couldn't do anything and when they wanted to, it was too late. We were already organized. They thought these old women will be scared off by the arrests, that it would be enough. (qtd. in Fisher, *Mothers* 60-61)

Fisher also argues that the mothers organized as mothers because that is what they were, not because motherhood was an identity that they were trying to manipulate.

The impact of the disappearances on the families and the mothers was traumatic.

Bouvard explains:

The disappearance of a son or daughter was a shocking personal tragedy that ultimately undermined the foundations of their social, political and psychological worlds. The first institution to buckle under the violence of the terror was the family. In Argentine society, home and family form the pivot of a woman's life... When their sons and daughters were dragged away without a trace, relationships within the nuclear and extended family were also shattered. (66)

The home and family are most important in this country and an important point in the understanding of how and why these mothers had the courage to protest publicly. Their worlds and their identities as mothers were shattered. Ironically, the mothers empowered themselves by their roles as mothers—a role once rejected in the male-dominated public sphere.

When the mothers did not receive the information they wanted, they wrote letters, petitions, and placed newspaper ads, demanding information about their children. They circulated letters that stated: *Los militares se han llevado nuestro son hijos*. (The military have taken our children.) By July 1977 the mothers' group had grown to more than 150.

On October 5, 1977, the mothers published a half-page ad in the newspaper *La Prensa* titled "All we want is the truth." By now 237 mothers were demanding a reply

from the dictatorship regarding the whereabouts of their children. When the generals would not reply, hundreds of women presented a new petition to the authorities with 24,000 signatures, calling for investigations into the disappearances and for those illegally detained, freedom for those detained without trial and the immediate transfer to civil courts those already on trial. Some three hundred Madres were dispersed from the Presidential Palace by tear gas.

The generals, now seeing the mothers as a threat to their censorship, on December 8, 1977, kidnapped, imprisoned, and disappeared 12 women. Among these were founding members Vincenti, the Madres' first leader, Careaga, Bianco; and two French nuns. It was then that Hebe de Bonafini was asked to assume the leadership of the group.

The country had been silenced, but the 1978 World Soccer Cup took place in Buenos Aires and was won by Argentina at the peak of the repression. Unlike the Argentine media, the international media coverage did not censor the human rights violations. The military tried to project and protect the image that nothing was wrong, but the Madres continued their marches in the Plaza. This act drew exposure to the Madres who were drawing attention to the disappeared. The mothers had anticipated this chance at exposure and had sent hundreds of letters to foreign politician seeking interviews with different world TV networks. According to Bonafini, "They all considered us good journalistic material" (qtd. in Steiner 109). Because the Madres were boycotting the World Cup, the Dutch TV decided to send pictures of the mothers instead of the shots of the opening (109).

Following the World Cup, the Madres marched again in 1978 on the Presidential Palace and presented another petition. They were then barred from the Plaza de Mayo. It

was completely sealed off by metal barriers and squadrons of military police. The mothers resorted to lightning actions, gathering on one side of the square and running across the other side before getting caught. The mothers were still meeting in homes and churches, but with the help and financial support from organizations abroad, they were able to open their own office.

In 1978-1979, the Madres traveled to other countries, requesting help from foreign governments in North America and Europe. During this time, a subgroup of the Commission of Relatives of the Disappeared, the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Abuelas) had formed to find the disappeared children who had been either captured with their parents or born during captivity.

On May 14, 1979, the mothers created the Association of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. The Association was officially registered on August 22 the same year that twenty women signed the founding document in front of a notary public outlining the Asociación Madres. They took the name that the people had given the mothers as they were seen circling the Plaza de Mayo. The Madres elected an eleven-member commission with Bonafini as president and Maria Adela Antokoletz as vice president.

In the fall of 1979, the military government passed two laws. The Presumption of Death Because of Disappearance law was issued on September 12, 1979, declaring dead those who had been reported missing during the previous five years (Bouvard 139). The second law, called Social Security Benefits in the Case of the Absence of the Person, was actually an amendment to the first law, which pertained to claims to property of people who were missing (Schirmer 9).<sup>7</sup> The implication was that the government had prepared

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<sup>7</sup> Both laws can be found in the *Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos*, 1984: 143-5.



these two laws to regulate the situation of persons presumably dead and that the disappeared were no more than unregistered deaths of subversives. The Madres condemned the legislation on the grounds that there should be no presumption of death until there was accountability for the death, demonstrating their slogan: “Let them appear Alive and let the guilty be punished” (Femenía 15). In November 1979, approximately seven hundred relatives of the disappeared presented a petition to a Civil and Commercial Court judge declaring the total unconstitutionality of the Laws.

By August 1980, the Madres had grown to over two thousand when they retook the Plaza de Mayo with another petition. They were now a legally constituted organization with an office in Buenos Aires, branches developing in the provinces and an extensive network of support outside Argentina. They began publishing their own bulletin, and eventually adopted a new slogan, “Appearance Alive,” insisting that their children be returned alive.

On December 10 and 11, 1981, the Madres staged the first of three decades of Marches de la Resistencias (Resistance Marches) on the avenue leading to the Plaza de Mayo.<sup>8</sup> Unlike their previous silent marches around the Plaza de Mayo where there was only a small audience, thousands of Argentines joined the Madres for their first resistance march that occurred during the dictatorship. On Thursday, December 10, 1981, at 3:30 pm, 150 women began their march of resistance accompanied by Argentine Nobel Peace

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<sup>8</sup> The Madres resistance marches continued yearly until January 2006, protesting various social causes, including the prosecution of the military generals and priests.

Prize recipient Adolfo Esquivel.<sup>9</sup> Esquivel's work with human rights and families of the disappeared signaled the importance of the march.

After twenty-four hours of the first resistance, the Madres marched to the Avenida 9 de Julio to the rhythm of their slogans: "Freedom, freedom! Our children, where are they?" and "Missing, they say, where are they?" (Vásquez et al. 17). Bonafini estimates that there were 2500 people including mothers of the disappeared from Uruguay, the Mothers Netherlands (SAMM), Catherine Deneuve and Simone de Beauvoir (Vásquez et al. 17).

After the march, the Madres began a twelve-day fast in the Quilmes Cathedral. During this fast, they issued press releases and telegrams addressed to Pope John Paul II and the military junta, demanding the appearance for the life of detained and disappeared. According to Bonafini,

Both the Resistance March and the fasting demonstrated our desire for a constitutional government that would permit us to come out of that night of horrors with the hope—still—of finding some of the disappeared and, above all, of punishing those responsible. We already had a list of the military leaders whom we believed, naively, we were going to be able to both condemn and punish. (qtd. in Steiner 142)

In addition to finding their children, the mothers' demands now included the punishment of those responsible.

On March 26, 1982, the military junta invaded the Malvinas Islands, and on June 20, 1982, the Malvinas War ended.<sup>10</sup> After the defeat of Malvinas/Falklands by the

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<sup>9</sup> In 1976 Esquivel initiated an international campaign aimed at persuading the United Nations to establish a Human Rights Commission, and in this connection a document was drawn up recording breaches of human rights in Latin America. See [nobelprize.org](http://nobelprize.org).

<sup>10</sup> The Madres had declared their solidarity with the mothers of the soldiers who were fighting in the Malvinas.

United Kingdom, the military junta collapsed. On October 30, 1983, Raúl Alfonsín from the Radical Party was elected the first democratic president. However, Alfonsín was reluctant to prosecute those responsible for the state terrorism.

The assumption of civilian governance, however, did not end the impact of the military regime on the tens of thousands of relatives of the disappeared, and the Madres at the Plaza de Mayo continued to press for the truth regarding those responsible for the disappearances of their relatives. Among other protests, at a National Meeting of Madres on June 2, 1985, they accused the District Attorney of accepting the military's distinction between innocent and guilty victims. They were angry that certain of the disappeared had been declared terrorists or subversives, because this implied that the victims themselves were on trial rather than the former government. This particular rhetoric was a pivotal point in the Madres' defense of their children and the Madres were offended that their children were considered guilty of any crime.

Up until 1982, the Madres' support was growing at home and abroad. They showed photos of their children, and they told stories of the kidnappings and of their silent marches around the Plaza de Mayo. However, once the Malvinas War began, nationalism became popular and the Madres were branded as parents of reprobates who had died or disappeared for offending the guardians of the nation; they were harassed by nationalist sentiments feeding on the junta's war (Dabat and Lorenzani 76). The Madres would be called traitors because of their resistance to the military; the war against subversion would be sanctified as the prelude to the war for the Malvinas (Dabat and Lorenzani 76). This was neither a counter-movement nor suppression by the establishment, but backlash from growing nationalism and anti-subversive sentiment. The

Madres' children were branded as subversives and hence the Madres also assumed this same position by defending their children.

After the installation of the democratic president, the Madres converted their Articles of Asociación into a series of concrete proposals by which all the human rights groups united. This is what the Madres wanted:

1. The return of the *detenido desaparecidos* alive.
2. The restitution of kidnapped children and those born in captivity to their legitimate families.
3. The immediate release of all those detained for political and trade union reasons.
4. An investigation into the burials of the unidentified bodies.
5. Trial [for those] responsible for the disappearances, torture and murders.
6. The lifting of the State of Siege.
7. The repeal of anti-democratic legislation and the dismantling of political repression.
8. The rejection of any type of amnesty. (Fisher, *Mothers* 120)

The Madres had an image of powerless grieving mothers in the beginning, but now they defined themselves as defenders of life and keepers of peace. Their involvement with political issues signaled a reframing of their goals.

Because Alfonsín had campaigned on a human rights platform, the mothers were hopeful for the changes they wanted. However, they didn't stop their demonstrations and they kept protesting the new democratic government. The Madres publicly requested that the new government bring back alive those who were detained-disappeared. They also

requested freedom for all political and trade union prisoners and demanded that those responsible for the deaths be put on trial (Fisher, *Mothers* 125).

On the last Thursday of military rule the buildings in the centre of Buenos Aires were painted with thousands of silhouettes. Thirty thousand people joined the Madres in the Plaza de Mayo in an emotional gathering which reflected the mixture of happiness, sorrow and above all, hope, which the women felt as the country approached the imminent departure of the military. Bonafini declared to the assembled crowds: “For us the struggle isn’t going to change, it’s going to continue exactly the same. Instead of putting our demands to the military, we are going to put those demands to the constitutional government” (qtd. in Fisher, *Mothers* 125).

Because of their positions as mothers of the disappeared, the Madres were not willing to give up their resistance to the new Argentine government. As women, they had previously held no real positions of power, but as organized mothers they had brought their private lives into the public, socializing motherhood and indirectly elevating women’s positions.

### *Transformation of the Madres, 1987-2003*

By 1987, the Madres were an internationally known movement. They had made their demands known to the new democratic government and they continued to establish themselves as mothers with power who wanted justice.

In 1986, the arrival of a forensic anthropologist and one specialist to identify the remains of the disappeared was opposed by some of the mothers because identifying remains implied abandoning the demand that those who had been taken be returned alive.

When a group of forensic anthropologists led by Clyde Snow and supported by the Abuelas (grandmothers) began to unearth the collective graves that had been marked N.N.<sup>11</sup> by the military government (Peluffo 90), the question of mourning the disappeared became a contentious issue between the two factions. The task of the forensic experts was to scientifically examine the remains of the dead to gather evidence against the military for a trial that was called the Argentine Nuremberg.

The Madres opposed the exhumations because they were fighting to keep their loved ones' memories alive through the circulation of silhouettes, masks, photographs, and banners. To accept the death of a whole generation without knowing the way in which they died was for Bonafini a way of killing them again. When the forensic teams unearthed the hundreds of collective graves that were hidden in the cemeteries of Buenos Aires, the Madres, led by Bonafini circled several graves in order to prevent the scientific teams from doing the exhumations (Peluffo 92).<sup>12</sup> Preventing the bodies from being exhumed was a physically aggressive act. Bonafini was indignant, claiming that: "We need to know who the murderers were, not the murdered."<sup>13</sup> While Bonafini and other Madres adamantly opposed the exhumations, some of the Madres wanted to recover the remains of their loved ones and to bury their family members in a dignified manner (Peluffo 91).

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<sup>11</sup> The letters N.N. or N. stand for the Latin *nescio*, not known, from the verb *necire* meaning to ignore.

<sup>12</sup> Peluffo summarizes: Clay Snow unearthed in the cemetery of San Isidro the remains of Roberto and Beatriz Lanouscou, a *montonero* couple who, according to military records, had been killed in an armed confrontation in the company of their three children. When the bodies of four-year-old Barbara and six-year-old Roberto Lanouscou were recovered it was proven that they were killed at close range with an *Itaka* shotgun. However, in the baby coffin that belonged to six month-old Matilde, the forensic team found bones that upon close inspection proved to be those of a man's foot. The substitution of bones proved that perhaps baby Matilde had not been killed, as the military had claimed, but was given instead to an unknown military family for adoption, a fact that was later confirmed by incidental evidence at a trial (16).

<sup>13</sup> Speech of Bonafini at the commemorations of the military coup of 1976 held in the Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires, 24 March 1986, published in *Boletín de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* 2, no 17 (1986).

In 1986, the Madres group splintered and twelve mothers, led by Renee Epelbaum and Maria Adela Antokoletz, formed a new group, the *Madres Linéa Fundadora* (Founding Line of Mothers). The new group accepted the need of families to adjust to changing circumstances. Antokoletz argued that families should be free to choose whether to receive the physical remains of their desaparecidos, and whether to accept reparations (Femenía 17).

The split was a pivotal point in the Madres' movement when the new group distanced themselves from Bonafini. A previous split had occurred in the past when many of the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Grandmothers) were also members of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. According to Peluffo, there was a rumor that the grandmothers had a difficult relationship with Bonafini from the start. When the grandmothers made posters with pictures of their grandchildren to celebrate Children's Day, Bonafini told them to find another plaza (Peluffo 89).

The Madres split in 1986 for many reasons. According to Matilde Mellibovsky, the differences between the two groups of mothers that had been muted by the urgent task of remaining united against the horrors of dictatorship became insurmountable with the arrival of democracy (qtd. in Peluffo 90). Although both groups agreed that the constitutional government had betrayed the cause of the disappeared by sanctioning the Law of Due Obedience, the Madres Linéa Fundadora still wanted to collaborate with the democratic government (Peluffo 90).

Bouvard believes that the main reason for the split was disagreement over whether or not to participate in CONADEP (National Commission on the Disappearance

of Persons)<sup>14</sup> hearings and whether or not to support the government's attempt to exhume bodies. The demand for accountability was a reaction against the CONADEP report ordered by Alfonsín in which the names of the military men who had committed crimes against humanity were carefully deleted.

The Madres also disagreed on their path to action: One group wanted to work peacefully with the new democracy; one group distrusted democracy. The Founding Line of Madres continued to work with the new government and continued to march Thursdays around the Plaza de Mayo, as a separate group.

Another contentious issue among the Mothers was the willingness of some members of the association to accept economic remuneration from the government. Peluffo writes that she approached Bonafini after one of the Madres' regular Thursday marches and asked her about the divided configuration of the march. She explained to Peluffo that the few mothers who left the movement took the money that Alfonsín's government gave the relatives of the disappeared to compensate them for their loss. She also explained that some mothers chose to accept Alfonsín's desire to turn the mothers of the missing into the mothers of the dead by collaborating with him on the exhumations, the posthumous memorials and the CONADEP report (85). In the end, she said, referring to her own group of mothers, "we have done much better, we have a radio, a café and even a university. And what do they have?" When she was asked her about *Botín de Guerra* (2005), a documentary about the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo that won

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<sup>14</sup> The National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, created in 1983 by Raúl Alfonsín, gathered information from and about the people who had disappeared during the dictatorship. The Commission report showed that the repression had no respect for age, but concentrated especially on those who were sixteen to thirty-five years old. It was established that a number of children born in clandestine detention centers (and the book suggests that there were between 200 and 300 such children, of whom only 13 had been identified by 1984) were placed in "decent families," and the majority of their parents were eliminated. The official report was titled *Nunca más*, Never again).



several prizes at international film festivals, she [Bonafini] made a face. She refrained from giving me [Peluffo] a negative report but instead recommended another documentary. “To tell you the truth,” she [Bonafini] added at the end, as if sensing that all my questions were pointing in the direction of fractured sisterhood, “it is all a question of class” (qtd. in Peluffo 85).

Taking money from a president who was not willing to go all the way in prosecuting the military was, as Bonafini said, a form of prostitution because what they wanted was the names of the assassins. This particular point is emphasized by Bonafini’s aggressiveness and her unwillingness to work with Alfonsín. When the government offered economic reparations or pensions for the affected families, Bonafini replied “Our children’s lives cannot be exchanged for money” (qtd. in Feminía 17).

Another disagreement within the group was Bonafini’s aggressiveness towards the new government; her discourse was dramatically changing and she was not only giving voice to her children, she was beginning to work for her children’s goals of socialism and the anti-imperial ideals of Che Guevara. According to Patricia Steiner, by 1979 the mothers had come to the painful realization that their children could no longer be considered politically innocent, that they had not only been militant, but that they were also revolutionary activists. Hebe confessed that she herself had changed too (160). Did Bonafini’s transformation occur after she realized that her children would not be returned, or did her transformation occur because she refused to allow her children to be punished again by both an accusatory dictatorship and a democratic government that refused to recognize Bonafini’s role in supporting her children’s revolutionary ideals.

A split in the Madres’ movement also caused a shift in the group’s ideology. This

shift in the Madres' ideology had begun when education and culture became another front in the state terrorism. The generals had unleashed a cultural war in which the enemy sometimes did not know he or she was the enemy (Anderson 194). In 1977, General Massera had issued his idea about cultural subversion, saying, in a speech at the Universidad del Salvador in Buenos Aires, that the "ills of Western society could be traced to Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Albert Einstein" (qtd. in Anderson 194). This same cultural war had been fought by Bonafini's and other Madres' children; the cultural war had escalated into a war of revolution. In order for their children's war of revolution to be sustained, the Madres needed to make their children's images present in their activism. In addition to life-size silhouettes, they circulated paper cutouts shaped like human hands to symbolize the actual hands of their missing loved ones. They released balloons with the names of the disappeared attached to them. Later, they paraded wearing masks, to symbolize the common plight of all the victims of state terrorism (Femenía 15).

Nora Femenía notes that there was a gradual progression in their choice of symbolism for the loss of their children, from highly individualized representations like photographs to impersonal ones like masks. As this occurred, the individual nature of their losses was transformed into a collective loss. "One child, all the children," the mothers said (15).

Bonafini continued to demand that the Madres' children be returned alive. To request the impossible could have been a political tactic, and the situation presented a difficult dilemma for president Alfonsín because it was impossible to meet the mothers' demand for the return of the disappeared. When the dictatorship ended the government searched the concentration camp sites, as well as asylums and mental hospitals, but found

no survivors. The graves of the desaparecidos had been disguised and often could not be found at all. The truth seemed inescapable, yet the mothers were still there in the Plaza de Mayo every Thursday with their photographs and posters. They continued to demand: “Let them appear alive.”

Many question if the mothers were unaware of the situation or if they couldn't see that their demands were now obsolete. Or had they become committed to a political tactic that could not be negotiated with any government? They had transitioned from grieving mothers to political activists, but their activism had to take a different shape. It now had to be wrapped within another frame.

In their 2002 Bulletin, the Madres Asociación told about their history and their transition:

Since 1986, we began a process of political definition that we call “the socialization of motherhood.” Each of us began searching for her own son or daughter missing, but slowly we started to feel all mothers of the disappeared, assuming ownership for the thousands who had fallen into the streets, in the mountains, in the jungles, fighting or literate. Little by little, we went away on the Plaza de Mayo in the photo of the son or daughter particular, to bring the faces of any other child. After we were publishing the names and dates of disappearance of each of our kerchiefs [scarves]. Finally, [we]embroidered white kerchiefs in that [which] identify us, the slogan Emergence Alive.

This shift towards a collective identity with a shared sense of socialized motherhood strengthened the solidarity of the Madres and strengthened the social networks that sustain their activism (Bosco, 2001).

The splintering of the Madres' movement signaled a political and ideological split within the original organization. Bonafini's political platform also became a radical renewal of her children's revolutionary ideologies. The mothers still maintained their traditional role as mothers, but they also were using their maternal power as political

power. They had to retain the hierarchy of the maternal natural order to claim motherhood over all children in Argentina, Latin America, and the world. Bonafini's aggressive rhetoric was more than that of a pleading mother; it was transformed as the Madres expanding causes and dug them deeper into resistance, even after the fall of the dictatorship.

In response to state terrorism, the Madres had grown from a small group of frantic mothers to an organized association. Disagreeing on a course of action, the mother's movement split, and Bonafini embarked on a revolutionary path. As the leader and foremost speaker of the Madres, Bonafini's scope of discourse broadened. As the movement continued, her life and her goals changed. In the next chapter, I discuss Bonafini's life as a rhetor: her beginning, growth, and development. I present her life, influences, and the new direction of the Madres' movement to provide a larger foundation for analyzing her speeches.

## CHAPTER 3

### HEBE DE BONAFINI: LIFE, INFLUENCES, AND DIRECTION

Hebe de Bonafini is the leader of the longest organized mothers' social movement in Argentina. A look at her rhetorical life and influences will help us to understand her discourse and her motivations and goals and the significance of her discourse in leading and sustaining the Madres' movement. In this chapter, we will come to an understanding of the platform from which she developed her speaking career. Hence, her speeches that follow reveal her rhetorical strategies for a continued resistance after a fallen dictatorship. These strategies are born of Bonafini's life, influences, and direction for continued involvement in her children's activism.

#### *Brief Biography*

Hebe Maria Pastor de Bonafini was born on December 4, 1928, in El Dique, a small village near La Plata, south of Buenos Aires. As a child, Bonafini's family could not afford to send both her and her brother to school. She recalls that "there wasn't even any family discussion about it—everyone knew that education was for males. The men. They took me out of school" (qtd. in Steiner 22). Bonafini's brother left his studies and so neither of them made it through secondary school; Bonafini became a seamstress (Steiner 23).

She met her husband Humberto when she was fourteen and after a six-year courtship, they married on November 12, 1949 in the Church of San Francisco in La Plata (Steiner 31). Her son Jorge was born in December 1950 and two years later in 1952, Raúl was born. Their daughter Alejandra was born in 1965. Her life revolved solely

around her husband and her children. In *Hebe's Story* Bonafini recalls that when Jorge and Raúl were young adults, they began to question hers and her husband's fixed ideas, saying: "They often discussed the political situation, they criticized the world that we had constructed, they demolished our reasons; they shot down the sure, safe beliefs of our generation" (41). Steiner notes that both Jorge and Raúl would have been thoroughly familiar with the writings of the Argentine guerrilla hero, Che Guevara. Bonafini also states that at university age, her sons became militant (43). Militant in this sense means that her sons were developing new ideologies, more than likely stemming from the Marxist ideologies that were permeating universities. At this point in her life, Bonafini was open to the new thoughts and ideas that her sons were bringing home.

Bonafini explains her bond to her sons in *Hebe's Story*, and makes clear her acceptance of their new ideas. For example she states her sons' ability to understand political mistakes more than she and her husband had. She states:

They sought a rendering of accounts from us and challenged us to look with new eyes at things that were happening in our country. They were much more reflective and thoughtful than we had been a young people—or even as adults. They didn't necessarily accept the way things were. They felt that established truths should always be subject to examination. (qtd. in Steiner 42)

This is important to note because we will see that Bonafini's rhetorical foundation is based on her sons' ideals, and that her radicalism was born way before she had the need to express it.

Before the dictatorship took power in 1976, Bonafini admits that her life in El Dique was mundane and that she felt removed from the problems of the world. She thought that "the news on the radio, no matter how drastic, didn't succeed in drowning out the sound of washing the dishes or the almost incessant pebbling up on some casserole.

Our heads were always somewhere else” (qtd. in Steiner 35). Her family was the nucleus of her life, a life common for mothers in Argentina and all of Latin America where a woman’s realm was private and in her home. As a mother in Argentina in this time period, the role was to provide the foundational values for the children, to be a caretaker, and to not question the public realm where important men made decisions. Her role as a woman and mother was not to question what occurred publically, but to preside over the family. However, her sons’ influence was apparent too as she began to see the world from their eyes.

On February 8, 1977, Jorge, age 26, was abducted.<sup>1</sup> Bonafini searched frantically for information about where he was taken, but found nothing. On December 7, 1977, Raúl was also abducted. Bonafini recalls that after a few hours of calm and deep sadness, she knew she had to come out of her consuming sorrow and transform her grief into intelligence and “be on the attack” (qtd. in Steiner 98). Bonafini recalled that the abduction of Raúl uprooted the word “I” from her thinking and was converted into a “we” that changed her life. “Raúl was important to me, and so was Jorge. But the other children who had been taken away were my ‘disappeared’ as well. WE are all of us together, I thought, and we have to keep on, even though tomorrow they may beat us into dust...” (Steiner 98). This was the precipitating personal event in her life that brought her out of the private sphere. The influences of her private life would become overshadowed by her rhetorical actions.

In *A Lexicon of Terror*, Feitlowitz tells about the impact of the coup on La Plata, Bonafini’s home. “In terms of education, intellectual life, and social movements, La Plata has been historically avant-garde. Its Museum of Natural Sciences is the best in South

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<sup>1</sup> On May 25, 1978, Maria Elena Bugnone, Jorge’s wife, was also abducted.

America” (178). She adds: “Logically enough, La Plata was a special target of the repression. Proportionally it lost more of its younger population (16-27 year-olds) than any other Argentine city” (178). Because of the significance of La Plata, Bonafini’s life and involvement in finding her children became even more important.

Bonafini continued to go to the official offices in Buenos Aires to search for information about her sons and it was there that she met Azuncena Villaflor Vincenti, a mother who was also searching for information about her abducted son, Néstor, and his wife Raquel Mangin. Vincenti had organized a meeting of mothers at the Plaza de Mayo, and Bonafini joined this group which was demanding answers from the dictatorship just outside of the Casa Rosada. The Casa Rosada is the government pink house, executive branches and presidential offices where the president lives.<sup>2</sup>

In an essay by Bonafini and Matilde Sanchez, the authors describe Bonafini’s first meeting with the mothers at the Plaza de Mayo. She says that the women were passing around and signing a letter that they had written to President Videla pleading for their children. Bonafini describes the event:

Behind us, the city kept on at its rhythm; it didn’t seem to realize that we were there. Men were hurrying because banks were closing; some retired men, completely indifferent, were lying in the sun. We women might well be alumnae of some school, meeting to arrange another reunion. Most of us were about my age or somewhere in their fifties; Azuncena moved quickly, like a young woman, but she was a little older. She and I became friends. I agreed with the petition, and I signed it. I did it with a large, clear signature so that the president would read my name and it would be engraved on his eyes. Also, so that he would know that my son’s name gave me no shame. (433)

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<sup>2</sup> The balcony of the Casa Rosada is where Eva Perón made her final farewell address before her death. There are two legends that explain why the building is pink. One is that the pink color was made by mixing cow’s blood into white paint to protect the building from the humid climate of Buenos Aires. The other story is that former President Domingo Sarmiento wanted to lessen political tensions by mixing the white of the Liberal party with the red of the Radicals.



Bonafini's life had been disrupted by the dictatorship, by the ideologies that were sweeping Argentina, and by the governments' claim that her children were subversives. As a mother and wife, she had not previously involved herself with the public realm of politics. She was desperate for information about her children when she joined the other mothers. Together these mothers formed the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and became a formally organized association and protest movement. Bonafini's role became that of leader and spokesperson, a position for which she had not been formally educated, but a role for which she was suited by her outspoken manner and her close ties to Vincenti. As the president and leader of the Madres, her oratorical skills developed as she spoke. Thus, even without formal training, she became an effective-practitioner of argumentative and strategic rhetoric necessary for a social movement leader.

### *Influences*

When Vincenti was abducted, Bonafini was thrust into the responsibility of leader of the Madres. Her role model had been Vincenti, and though she may have patterned her leadership style from others, there were few women in the political realm at that time from whom she might have acquired her leadership style. We might assume that she held Eva Perón in esteem, as many men and women did, but Perón had taken pride in standing in the shadow of her husband, something Bonafini was not doing. Although Evita was often called the mother of Argentina, she had no children of her own; she had mothered the union workers and the poor.

Bonafini developed a close relationship with Vincenti and she admits that she observed Vincenti carefully; she valued Vincenti as the master of quickness and shrewd intelligence. Bonafini describes how the mothers felt about their first leader:

We all wanted to be imbued with her spirit and that feeling of security she gave us that encouraged us to take small steps. We admired the independence with which she did things and her natural charisma—not the deceitful show of politicians, but something that came from the strength of a person who argues on the side of truth.” (qtd. in Steiner 90)

Bonafini also learned a sense of creativity from Vincenti. She told her once that she was always thinking up something and that she wished she would learn to do things like that (Steiner 101). On Human Rights Day, December 10, 1977, Vincenti walked to the kiosk on the corner by her house in Sarandi and was never seen again. Bonafini claims that Azuncena’s spirit and strength live in all the mothers (Steiner 102).

Bonafini gradually put herself in charge of the connections with the mothers of the disappeared in La Plata, and they marched around the Plaza San Martin in La Plata every Wednesday. When the other mothers at the Plaza de Mayo asked her to be the new leader, she accepted. Bonafini recalls:

We had developed into an organization without knowing it. We didn’t know what an organization should be like, we just thought if we had something more formal, it would give us better protection and it would encourage more women to join us. When it was suggested that I should be president, I didn’t need to think twice” (qtd. in Fisher, *Mothers* 91).

Not long after Vincenti’s death, Bonafini led a group of mothers to the United States and to promote activism and seek help for the dictatorship’s actions. Bonafini tells the story in *Mothers of the Disappeared*, saying that none of the mothers had ever been abroad before and they had never spoken to people in such positions of power. Also, they didn’t speak English (qtd. in Fisher, *Mothers* 76). The mothers spent a few days in the

United States; they talked to Edward Kennedy, congressmen and journalists and visited other human rights organizations and they also went to speak at the United Nations (Fisher, *Mothers* 77). Bonafini admits that the mothers didn't have anything prepared and that she had never used a prepared speech: "I've always considered that if you talk to people, explain exactly what's happened, you can work things out" (qtd. in Fisher, *Mothers* 77). She also states that the first time she spoke in the United Nations the mothers didn't have anything written down:"

We saw all the organizations with everything ready, with files and papers and we had nothing. Someone said that they would represent us if we wanted and we said, no, we're just going to speak. I wasn't afraid because as I said before, I believe that everyone is equal. There are no categories, however much they want to make them. (qtd. in Fisher, *Mothers* 77)

When they returned to Argentina, the mothers decided to become a formal organization. This act represents a termination of their unorganized resistance and a beginning of their organized resistance. In part, they had achieved the goal of getting their message heard, but their children were still missing.

Bonafini was elected president and admits that "I felt that to search for our children was the only way to continue being a mother" (qtd. in Steiner 117). Her maternal reasoning validated her feelings of loss, yet her hope of finding her children, at this point, had not ended. Her desire and the Madres' desire to maintain eternal motherhood was to continue the movement for their children.

A major authority in her life is the voice of her sons. In 1978, Bonafini received a letter from Raúl, which he had written from prison. She states in *Hebe's Story* that there was a young woman who had been pregnant when she got out of La Cacha, the same prison where Raúl was held. She came to La Plata to see Bonafini, saying that she didn't

know much about Raúl, but that he had written Bonafini's name and address on the edge of her skirt. Two years later, she was visiting Bonafini to give her a poem in Raúl's handwriting. Bonafini recalls that: "He was speaking from a place that was beyond my knowing and I didn't have the heart to read it all" (qtd. in Steiner 127).<sup>3</sup>

In the poem, the fusion of life and death, of birth and life, is a directive from Bonafini's son and a vision for the future. Bonafini is charged with her son's wish: "don't ever forget these thoughts of mine." His words: "when I come out from inside of you" signals a symbolic birth of her son—symbolic in the sense that she will again give birth to his ideas, and that her responsibility is now to sustain her son's memories. Her son's thoughts "simultaneously are focused on a strange sensation that something is arising from the affection of many chained bodies." His bond with the other prisoners is strong and he passes this along to his mother—that his happiness is dependent upon the other disappeared. Transferred to her is the belief that her happiness too will be found within this bond.

Bonafini's rhetoric is replete with the bond of her children to all children; of her children as prisoners to all prisoners. This was a personal direction that connected Bonafini to her sons. As a stay-at-home mother with little education, she had no formal training in movement protest and like most of the Madres, she may have had strong opinions and her own emotional intelligence instead of the level of education necessary to calculate political decisions. Her rhetorical strategies seem to be rooted in a mother's common sense. Her voice arose out of the necessity of a mother searching for her children. This is an important point. Her response to the necessity of circumstances was

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<sup>3</sup> Bonafini claims that she was not able to read all of the poem until July 1985, when, she says, "At times one feels that, truly, there is nothing left" (Steiner 127). See Appendix for the complete version.

one of a mother searching for her children. The urgency of the moment and the responses that were demanded were central to her actions. These feelings may have been true for all mothers, however, not all mothers responded rhetorically to the urgency. The difference for Bonafini could have been her sons' influence and her close bond with them.

In 1982, Bonafini's husband, Humberto, died of cancer, and it was during this time that Bonafini began connecting the Madres' work in finding their own children to assisting all children and oppressed worldwide. In *Hebe's Story*, Bonafini explains that she began to think about death in a very personal way and admitted that "all those deaths are but one single death and there is one single pain, great and persistent, that is always floating to one side of all my moments" (145). She claims that Humberto's death marked a before and an afterwards for her and gave a symbolic account of her cause for truth and justice:

Not one hundred dictatorships, nor a hundred democracies, not a whole burst of machine-guns will be able to stop me. The reason for this is that I bear no weapons, only a closed fist where I keep the truth. That fist is not to beat anyone—it is for raising with a shout and opening the hand so that everyone can see the truth. And that hand will also be a sign that I demand what by law belongs to me—the confession and punishment of all those guilty of disappearing so many people in Argentina. (qtd. in Steiner 148)

Bonafini also describes her lack of mourning for her sons and the action that fulfilled the mothers' fear. She says that she never sat down and cried and that she never screamed or shut herself in for days to sniff the clothes that her children had left behind.

The Madres' action was multiplied by the number of mothers working for resistance against the dictatorship. We wouldn't say, 'They beat them, they torture them, they drag them off, they make them faint.' We would say, 'We have to send a letter to Laghi. We must see Primatesta.' We had to work until we dropped, until we were

completely spent. That way we could sleep at night (Bonafini and Sanchez 439). The mothers' approach to grief was to avoid grieving. The overwhelming truth of what was happening was the catalyst for the mothers' rhetorical strategies as they transferred their emotional grief to the physical work required for writing letters, interviewing, and decision-making.

Bonafini's work had also escalated into opportunities to speak publically. Her oratory and leadership style in time would replicate Che Guevara and Fidel Castro in some ways, but not a famous female orator. Her voice may not be a replica of other leaders, male or female, but it is the collective voice of her children and her anger at those responsible for their disappearance, as we will see in the chapters that follow.

The next selection looks at how the ideology of the Madres changed and how the mothers assumed new roles of activists as they realize that their children will not be returned.

### *New Direction*

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo continued to protest the dictatorship with letters, newspaper ads, petitions, slogans, and resistance marches under Bonafini's leadership and as an officially organized group. By 1983 and the installment of a new democratic government, many people saw the mothers as heroines; the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo had become models for women's protests groups in Latin America and around the world. Because of the dictatorships in other countries, mothers began to realize their power as women and as providers of the family values that the dictatorships sought.

Bonafini contributed to this impression as she maintained her position as leader of the mothers and protector of disappeared.

According to Steiner, almost from the very beginning of the state terrorism, the mothers viewed the Argentine government as their enemy. Bonafini said that the mothers felt that they were “a direct product of the injustice of men, not just of the oppressors, but also of those who covered up for them. If the church had listened to us, if the judges had answered us about how to deal with the habeas corpus, and if the politicians we went to had not remained silent, we would not have gone to the Plaza” (qtd. in Steiner 152). In the beginning, they had gone to the Church for help, to the government offices and engaged politicians to ask for help. When no one offered assistance or explanations, the mothers formed their own resistance in order to achieve a collective power to resist the dictatorship and a democracy that would not bring those responsible to trial. Over time, the Madres’ anti-government stance hardened and expanded until it included governments anywhere that they felt were oppressing people (Steiner 152).

Bonafini and the Madres also began to form a new image of themselves as activists and militant mothers. It was no longer enough to go to the Plaza or to have a child who had disappeared. A mother had to have an active militancy (Steiner 160). This position had begun in 1979 when the mothers had come to the painful realization that their children could no longer be considered politically innocent, that they had not only been militant, but that they were also revolutionary activists. Bonafini confessed that she herself had changed too (Steiner 160). She states:

It was the disappearance of my sons that put me consciously on the left. But it took quite awhile before I could acknowledge myself as a revolutionary militant. First I sense it. Then I actually dared to say it. From 1980 on I began to feel that I should commit myself more and more to what I was saying. (qtd. in Steiner 161)

She had been speaking as a revolutionary mother, but realized that she needed to commit herself more to that position that she now held.

Bonafini was gradually able to articulate her new political orientation, saying:

Everything that concerns the fight for a new kind of man, for liberation, for total change and revolution if it is Marxist, or communist, Maoist, Trotskyist, anarchist—even if it is all those “ists” together—if it synthesizes everything I want, well, then that’s what I am. It doesn’t frighten me one bit, because I am already completely fed up with all the niceties of definition. (qtd. in Steiner 161)

Bonafini no longer feared what she had become, a militant mother now fighting for revolution. Her definition of who she was had changed and so her discourse began to change too. She was beginning to live up to her actions and she believed that the people’s reciprocal violence is justifiable, saying that “the revolutionary guerrilla is part of an army of people that takes to the streets to find bread for their children and in that measure, I justify violence and I condone it” (qtd. in Steiner 162).

Another point in the new direction was that Bonafini and the Madres rejected amnesty laws for the military, claiming that the generals were all criminals. The objection to amnesty began during Alfonsín’s first month in office when he sent telegrams to the mothers saying that their children were dead in such and such cemetery and sent some of them boxes with human remains that he asserted were their children (Steiner 163). It is hard to imagine a mother opening a box with her son’s or daughter’s remains, and although families were offered monetary restitution, it appeared as though Bonafini and the Madres wanted a different kind of restitution for their children—one that maintained punishment and upheld the beliefs of their children. Bonafini’s aggression was not befitting of a mother, so we see that although the Madres’ strived to maintain their



motherhood in the public realm, this position came with definitions of how mothers should sound and act.

During the 1980s, many Argentines wanted to forget and to move beyond the deaths; many began to see the mothers as a disruptive undercurrent that kept the country on edge (Steiner 165). The Madres continued to persist in taking strong stands and using strong language to confront the existing Argentine government. Because traditional women's roles did not include aggressive behavior, the mothers were seen as women who weren't able to come to terms with the loss of their children. The Madres were seen as perpetual and painful reminders of the past which was still painful for those who had lost loved ones or suffered torture themselves. In 1986 when Bonafini and the Madres made the decision to remain confrontational to the new democratic government, the Madres' organization split.

Bouvard believes that class distinctions, education, and organized models and attitudes towards the political process distinguish the mothers of the Founding Line from the Madres de Plaza de Mayo: in the Madres' own official written history, there is no mention of the split (16).

An event in 1988 brought Bonafini closer to the revolutionary activism of her children. She and other mothers went to Cuba for the International Congress of Women. There she met Fidel Castro and began learning more about Che Guevara's revolutionary work. When the Madres opened their Universidad Popular, they named Guevara as their major topic of study, claiming that they train revolutionaries.

Bonafini's transformation stemmed from the Madres' emphasis on the ideals of truth and social justice that they felt had inspired their children. They spoke of their sons

and daughters as militants who had given their lives for a utopia, and they identified their children as the ones who had given birth to their own beliefs and actions—to everything that the Madres had become (Steiner 171).

In October 1988, Bonafini gave a tribute to Che Guevara, speaking of Guevara's vision as it connects to her children's vision. In the early 1990s, Bonafini and the mothers traveled internationally to denounce imperialism and organizations that supported it; Bonafini gave speeches at universities and conferences. Her first effort on behalf of victims around the world was to denounce imperialism and organizations that supported it. By 1994 when Bonafini addressed the United National International Conference, strong expressions of anti-American feeling began to run through her written and spoken words. Her hatred for the United States was generated by her conviction that U.S. arms were behind the subjugation of Argentine people and that the Argentine military were educated like robots in the military doctrine of the U.S. (Steiner 111). In 1995 in Buenos Aires, Bonafini claimed that "democracy is just a fiction where the people are encouraged to believe that they are deciding their destiny, while, in reality, everything is resolved in secret" (qtd. in Steiner 111).

By 1999, Bonafini's stubborn militant and explosive language were such that she and the mothers were now beginning to be discredited, not just by the Argentine government, but also by human rights organizations (Steiner 183). Also, many claimed that the mothers had developed an almost mystical relationship with their children (Steiner 183). This relationship can be interpreted in various ways in Bonafini's speeches that illustrate her unique connection to her children.

In 1999, the Madres receive the UNESCO prize for peace education, indicating that the Madres had established sufficiently high regard and that their work was valued internationally. Bonafini's acceptance speech outlines the nature of the Madres' work; she believed that she must speak for her sons:

If they cannot be here, then I have had to take their place, to shout for them... I feel them present in my banners, in my unending fatigue, in my mind and body, in everything I do. I think that their absence has left me pregnant forever. (qtd. in Steiner 98)

Being pregnant forever is a metaphor for eternal motherhood. At this point it might have been a calculated political strategy, unlike at the beginning of the mothers' resistance, but it had become a conscious position and persona, important to maintain her political position. Her grief is fueled by the voices of her sons—with the words that they cannot say but that she believes they want her to say. She is waiting for their re-birth, a symbolic notion that signifies her belief in their return.

Her speech in 2002, "I am the Other" clearly states the Madres connection with all children, with all oppressed. Also given in 2002, Bonafini outlines her political position in "We Believe in Revolution, We Believe in Socialism!" This is a clear message for the Madres, one that resonates again in 2003 in her speech, "Act in Solidarity with the Zanón Workers."

After the fall of the dictatorship in 1983 and the split of the Madres in 1986, Bonafini's rhetoric became more aggressive, confrontational, and revolutionary. She is a representative of her children and she is proud of their revolutionary spirit. The factors that drove her rhetoric in the beginning were the disappeared children, and as she realized that her children were not going to appear alive, she became more realistic about their absence and more distrustful of the government. As a movement leader, Bonafini did not

follow a predicted pattern. Instead of aligning with the new government she and the Madres continued to oppose democracy until 2006.

Bonafini's outspoken discourse is evidenced in her speeches and interviews. She speaks out against Pope John Paul II, she spoke out against the United States after the September 11 attacks, and she speaks out against capitalism, the International Monetary Fund, and those responsible for the tortures and murders of an estimated thirty thousand Argentine citizens during the 1976-1983 dictatorship. She supports FARC in Colombia, Fidel Castro, and the Latin American left in South America, including Evo Morales in Bolivia and Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. The Madres work towards freeing political prisoners and helping women and children and eradicating poverty in Buenos Aires. They continue to march around the Plaza de Mayo on Thursdays, but support the administration of President Christina Kirchner and also supported the late Néstor Kirchner, both members of the Justicialist Party, a Peronist political party that since 1989 has been the largest party in the Argentine Congress. On March 24, 2010, the Madres organization celebrated thirty-four years of existence; Bonafini this year (2010) is eight-two.

Maybe it was Bonafini's visit to Cuba and her formal introduction to the work of Guevara that caused a shift in her rhetoric. Maybe it was the realization that their children were militant activists, or maybe it was the threat of exhumations of the disappeared that threatened an end to the Madres' work; to bury their children would be to bury their memories. Bonafini's rising anger and aggressiveness illustrate that she wants more than memories or money. She wants socialism and she aspires to train revolutionaries—all

acts inspired by their children whose voices hold Bonafini captive in a political realm that once denied the presence of mothers.

Bonafini's life, influences, and the Madres' political path are the foundation for her discourse. In the next five chapters, I'll describe the context, analyze, and summarize the five selected speeches that offer further insight into her role as leader into this most controversial mothers' movement.

## CHAPTER 4

### SPEECH 1: “TRIBUTE TO CHE IN THE ‘SWISS HOUSE’”

This chapter begins the analysis of Bonafini’s speeches. As the leader of the Madres’ organization, she is the spokesperson for the Madres’ ideals that had been transformed by the injustices of the dictatorship and the lack of justice by the democratic government.

For this analysis of Bonafini’s 1988 speech, “Tribute to Che in the ‘Swiss’ House,” I will summarize the political and rhetorical context of the speech, then I will describe the main ideas of the speech. I will analysis the speech for metaphors and other elements of rhetorical function, then conclude with a brief summary.

#### *Contextual Overview*

Democracy had been installed in 1983, and by 1988, there had been a failed coup d’ état under Alfonsín’s administration. The year 1988 was also a difficult regarding inflation and the economy as unemployment rose. The Madres’ movement split. Bonafini’s rhetoric became radically aggressive as the Madres continued to fight the democratic government. Bonafini was the leader and spokesperson for the Madres and had been asked to deliver a commemoration on October 8, 1988, the eve of the twenty-first anniversary of Che Guevara’s<sup>1</sup> death, in a small town in Buenos Aires province at a meeting place called Casa Suiza (Swiss House).

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<sup>1</sup> Ernesto (Ché) Guevara de la Serna was born June 14, 1928, and died October 9, 1967, at age thirty-nine. His nickname, Ché, may have derived from his habit of punctuating his speech with the interjection *Ché*, a common Argentine expression for friend.

In Argentina and most of Latin America, Che Guevara is a hero—an iconic savior who fought against imperialism. Born in 1928, in Rosario, Argentina, he became a doctor, traveled throughout Argentina and joined Fidel Castro in Mexico in 1954. As a follower of Marxism, he was one of the leaders of the 1956-1959 Cuban Revolution, served as president of Cuba's national bank and minister of industry. According to the *Ché Guevara Internet Archive* on Marxism.org, Guevara openly criticized the Soviet Union, claiming that the Northern hemisphere of the world, both the Soviet Union and the United States, exploited the Southern hemisphere. He was assassinated in 1967 by Bolivian soldiers.<sup>2</sup>

Bonafini has been seen as a radical revolutionary and a madwoman who circles the Plaza de Mayo in protest with other mothers, yet her goodwill was not on trial when she spoke to this audience. Once hailed as a hero, she is now called a mother of the subversives, and her status in the new democracy is that of radical. At the time of this Tribute, she had opposed the democratic government for five years.

However, her personal credibility with her audience is achieved through her knowledge of Guevara that she says she learned from her children. She conveys authority because she is the mother of the children who once were activists, and she claims that all she knows she learned from her children. She has come to praise Guevara, to convince her audience that his vision is still very much seen by others, and to persuade her audience to join in the Madres' resistance efforts that condemn capitalism.

The audience members at the event were admirers and supporters of Guevara, the Madres, and other human rights organizations. We can speculate that the audience's

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<sup>2</sup> Guevara supporters claim that the U.S. Green Berets and CIA played a part in his assassination.

values are those that appeal to justice and human rights and revolution. Other audience members may be there to celebrate Che Guevara, socialism, and liberation.

Bonafini's main ideas in the speech have a strong influence of Guevara's revolutionary thoughts and actions.<sup>3</sup> The Tribute demonstrates the philosophy and ideology of the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo: to liberate all of the victims of injustice in Latin America. Threaded throughout her speech are the issues of liberty, love, hope, and revolution. She makes clear in her discourse that she is committed to the revolution. The revolution, in this case, is Guevara's revolution—a fight against imperialism. Her message is that Guevara leads the revolution that her children once sought, and for which the Madres strive to adhere and she tells her audience that her words are not her words; they are the voice of her children. Creating visual images of her children's death, her goal is to persuade her audience to realize that revolution is a beautiful thing.

### *Message Analysis*

Bonafini's words present a model for understanding the Madres' path toward liberation and revolution; consideration of her ideals is important in understanding the rhetorical strategies used to sustain the movement after the fall of the dictatorship in 1983. In this tribute, Bonafini's vision, her rhetoric, and one of her most significant role models for justice, Che Guevara, illustrate her principles and the Madres' social movement goal: socialist revolution. Her testimonial discourse is persuasive; her

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<sup>3</sup> In his last letter to his children, "In Memoriam and Struggle," Guevara writes: Grow up as good revolutionaries. Study hard so that you can master technology, which allows us to master nature. Remember that it is the revolution that is important, and each one of us, alone, is worth nothing. Above all, always be capable of feeling deeply any injustice committed against anyone, anywhere in the world. This is the most beautiful quality of a revolutionary.



mothers' voice, once relegated to the private sphere, is a social and political voice that effectively convinces her audience to grasp revolution in a visionary way.

The purpose of her Tribute is to praise Che Guevara although a close reading of this speech reveals that Bonafini does much more than offer praise. She begins her Tribute by giving praise and thanks to revolutionary Guevara, then straightforwardly tells her audience to praise Guevara and to imitate his revolutionary ideals; she pleads for liberty. She is humble, repeating twice that she does not come to say anything new. By saying this, she gives more praise to Guevara, but she does have other motives for this tribute. She says that she was worried when she accepted the invitation to speak because she did not know Ernesto Che Guevara until her children made her see his struggle, and she did not know of his fight until he died because from her kitchen many things are difficult to understand. In other words, it was her children who introduced her to Guevara's work and that because she was uneducated mother, there are many things she didn't know about the political sphere in Argentina. It's important to remember that at the beginning of their resistance of the dictatorship, Bonafini and the other Madres were wives and mothers, mostly middle-aged with little or no education.

In her first introductory passage, she begins denying her own agency, giving credit to her deceased sons by saying that it is her children who allowed her to see the vision and that as a wife and mother whose world revolved around the home, she did not have the perspective necessary to understand all events in the public sphere.

In *Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs*, De Volo explains the theme of political indebtedness to children, which is a reversal of the birth process in which their children engendered political consciousness in their mothers (260n). De Volo believes that as they

[mothers] began to understand their children's concern for social change, they took on their children's demands. Consequently, by denying her own agency, Bonafini gives agency to her children and they are allowed to speak through her. This action compares to the trope prosopopoeia which allows the dead to give agency to the speaker. The twist is what makes Bonafini's use of her children's voices unique; they were denied their own agency and their own voices when they were alive, but now are given the chance to speak through their mother's voice.

Furthermore, Bonafini had once stated in an interview:

Every day when we wake up, we think of the day of work that our children call us to, those children that are in the square, who are in each and every one of us, those children which gave birth to us and to this awareness and to this work that we do. (qtd. in Fisher, *Mothers* 135)

“Gave birth to us” again lets us understand that her ideas are born from her children's—that her awareness did not begin until her children and other children helped her to see it. This birth metaphor serves as a double purpose: a birth metaphor that supports their agency through their biological motherhood and one that also supports the agency of their children.

She continues with her emotional appeal by saying that from seeing the destruction, desperation, horror, torture, and death in Argentina, she and the Madres learned that thousands of young people in Argentina had fought like Che and had raised their flags like Che and had the same results. She likens the death of the disappeared in Argentina to Che—comparing his struggle with revolution to the revolutionaries' struggle in Argentina, those subversives labeled as the desaparecidos. This appeal is surely convincing as she weaves the two types of revolutionaries together.

Bonafini humbles herself by claiming that there are no great things that have not already been said and that many people know more about Guevara than she does. She connects the death of her children to the death of Guevara by saying that although she didn't see her children die and the Madres requested *Appearance with Life* from the dictatorship, she knows that the majority of the children were shot and that she often imagines how her children's last minutes of life were and in what way they were assassinated. She says that when she thinks like this, an image of Che appears—the image that was in the newspapers and television. She says that the photos of him are serene—like those who fight for something so just. The antithesis of this statement—serene like those who fight—is a paradox that suggests his calm image presents a vision for those who fight. In this speech, she says:

And often I imagine how they would have been, their last moments and how they were assassinated. And then yes it appears the image which we all saw in newspapers; that image that we saw on television. Serene like all those who fight for something so just. And hopefully that image of that death, of that terrible murder of the Che and thousands and thousands of deaths has been like that, serene all these that fight for something so just and so beautiful like the liberations of the towns.

This particular passage is an eloquent and poetic vision of past and future combined. She constructs a paradox of the images (serene like all these that fight) and implants visualization with her words, creating the combined force of injustice of the deaths: Guevara's and the desaparecidos. She also declares a state of serenity, for the peace of liberation, the peace of beautiful death. This is what she wants for the future.

She admits and restates that she did not come to say anything new, but she says that the torture, deaths, and executions did not make the thoughts that those killed and that Che planted disappear. Even though the bodies are dead, the ideas, hopes, utopia, and

love of the towns will be reborn in each of the young people who also raise their fists to promise that won't abandon the fight [for liberation]. This is an odd sort of personification that brings those dead alive by their ideas and hopes that are to be reborn. It is the ideology that is to be reborn in the new groups of young people who continue to fight for liberation.

Bonafini points out that there are many who today demonstrate their passion (tear their clothes) for Che and that many today will raise their flags saying that they were there with the children, but that back then, many who did that said their children were terrorists. She is speaking of the traitors who she calls the liars who claim to want liberation but who would not fight for the children. Her point is that although there are many who give praise to Che and many who give praise to the disappeared for their revolutionary work, she resents that these people were not giving praise when the revolutionaries were taken.

Then she tells her audience that to be revolutionary is a beautiful thing and to do politics well with dignity and morality is also a beautiful thing. She wants the liberation to also be a beautiful thing. Her repetition of the words "beautiful thing" creates an atmosphere of hope and peace as she tries to convince her audience that to be a revolutionary is to have dignity and morality and that liberation is a worthwhile cause.

She metaphorically tells her audience to be rock and stone and to stand up, for everyone to be his or her own soldier and not let the right advance, so that they don't have to cry later. She says that the best self-criticism is to do it before each act. She is explaining that it is better for all to look inward than to wait until they have regrets. Then

for effect, she repeats twice: they will not move us; they will not move us, completing the thoughts of rock and stone.

Bonafini's general theme of the Tribute is revolution. She admires Guevara, in part, because her children (and other Argentina citizens) transferred their admiration of him to her. She requests of all which "raise the figure to them of the Che, remembering it, trying to imitate it, trying to include and understand it, so we do not forget those companions who still populate the Argentine jails." Here Bonafini is bringing the social memory of the state terrorism into her speech. Collectively, Argentine citizens are divided on this issue. Some want to forget it, some want to think that it never happened (as in Holocaust denial), yet others fight to maintain the memory of the atrocities. Keeping the memories of the disappeared is an important part of Bonafini's goals, and it is upon these memories that the Madres' resistance is founded.

She continues by saying that "the torture, the death and the execution broke neither the thought nor what they planted. Their bodies will be dead, but their ideas, their illusion, their utopia, their love to the town appears again in each one of the young people how [they raise their fists] to promise that it is not going to break off this battle." Their children's ideas continue through Bonafini, the Madres' and now through other young people. As a visionary revolutionary, she clearly sees a vision for utopia, where the young are alive and fighting, continuing the battle for justice and liberation—the seed has already been planted and the restitution is already in motion.

Throughout her speech, she employs "we" to connect common ground with the Madres, Guevara and the desaparecidos. Civic rhetoric becomes an important aspect of her tribute because she is asking for political and social change. Eldred and Mortenson

write of U.S. women's rhetoric in the 1920's: "Female civic rhetoric sought to effect political change by revealing public consensus, by appealing to a common sense of what was right; its goal was not to sway individual opinion, but to awaken the conscience of a republic" (175). This is interesting because Bonafini promises something similar in the tribute that "we are not going to abandon this battle. The battle includes the awakening of a revolution and the sustaining of the injustices of the deaths."

In evaluating her claims, we can see that Bonafini wants to change the language, stating: "The best language is the one of always, but also the one that is lived." This is an important insight because she is connecting language to action. She is also connecting language with a new social order. She claims that "Liberation without revolution is not possible. As it is not possible either without solidarity, without participation, without the base social organizations which are the ones that the police and army are appointing, and those are the ones they want to destroy."

She offers a plea for her audience to help all of the social organizations, and says that there is a need to fight within and outside of the parties so that they can conserve their dignity. Bonafini's idea of the best candidacy is the kind that is done together with the village, by the village, for the village. She wants her audience to fight for a village government because the village government is more likely to give and not receive.

Next she begins to speak again for the other Madres, saying that the mothers are very captivated with the fight [for liberation] and that they are only inclined to give. The mothers want the revolution to triumph someday so that their children (who had the best dreams) would also see Che's idea progress. Because this has not yet happened, she blames the indifferences of some, the complicity of others, and the terrorism of the state

(not just the state but all of Latin America) for the ways things are today [the lack of liberation].

Bonafini broadens her audience, continuing her emotional appeals by speaking to the mothers in Latin America—in Guatemala, Haiti, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile, Uruguay, Bolivia, and Peru—who are able to go into the streets and shout from their cars that this [liberation] is difficult but that young people will follow them. She has put great emphasis on the assistance of Latin American youth. She admits that she and the mothers are not going to see Guevara's revolution:

We are not going to see the revolution about which the Che dreamed, but are sure that we are on the way—in the beautiful way of the liberation! The one that began with our children, who we followed.

She positions the children as the leaders that she and others are following, an interesting juxtaposition that gives authority and leadership credibility to her children. In an opposite twist, she claims again: There will be young people—many—that surely are going to follow us.” Here the leadership role becomes blurred as she alters the leader and follower position to position. It is here that “us” does not solely mean the Madres, but all of those who work for Guevara's revolution.

She asks all to give a tribute to Che and to remember him, to imitate him and to understand him. Her persuasion continues as she creates another parallel between Guevara and those who are still in the Argentine jails. It is in her final words that Bonafini states the element of scapegoating by addressing the issues of the poor: “We do not have to ask ourselves anything, capitalism does what it always did. And if the right advances, it is because we left them in place.” Bonafini blames capitalism, which is a

major faction in punishing “those responsible.” This accusation is explained in an interview in Bonafini’s own words:

The enemy isn’t in the Casa Rosada. The torture, murders, the genocide were for one thing only: to apply an economic plan which would bring misery to the majority of the people and those responsible...are still free. It was the hands of the military that murdered but they were pushed by a class that always wants to dominate us. This class still dominates us. Economic repression is the strongest form of repression because with the repressive apparatus intact we always have to be alert. (qtd. in Fisher, *Mothers*145)

These words are important in understanding the nature of her speech and subsequent speeches concerning liberation. It is not only the military dictatorship the Madres were fighting—they were fighting the economic forces that allowed for the military rule’s devastation of Argentina and their children.

Bonafini does not separate her love for her children nor her love and respect for the revolutionary vision of Che Guevara. In the conclusion of her speech, she captures Guevara’s words possessively: “His ideals are ours.” She adds a visionary metaphor: “The Che always accompanies our marches.” Finally, she declares his immortality by saying: “He will continue being the light that illuminates revolutions!” Bonafini’s powerful political tribute illustrates her revolutionary ideals and her rhetoric of restitution in the Madres’ continued social movement for liberty, revolution, and justice.

### *Summary*

This tribute is a significant contribution to a study of Bonafini’s discourse because she identifies so strongly with Guevara’s ideologies—the same ideologies that she could not see until the death of her children made her see them. Born of her children’s ideals, Bonafini accepts her position as a mother who defends her children in a society that will



still not accept them. She offers the same praise of Guevara that her children gave him. His anti-imperialism becomes her capitalism which is her scapegoat. This tribute explains to us the nature of the revolution and those who promote it; Guevara and her children, are invisible and immortal carriers of the message. Her delivery of the Tribute is persuasive and she repeatedly makes connections revolution—Guevara’s and the disappeared. The effect that she has produced is more than a tribute of praise offers.

Bonafini’s public life during this time period is one that goes against her prior beliefs that mothers and wives belong in the home. During the dictatorship, her private world enlarged to include a political position in Argentina, South America, and around the world. The nature of the Tribute tells us that she has great praise for Che Guevara—so much so that she combines her understanding of her own children’s ideals to that of Guevara. Guevara is known as a rebel, an activist, and a revolutionary who is mainly known to have struggled to bring a message of hope and liberation to Latin America. His strength is replicated by Bonafini’s desire to fulfill her own sons’ wishes—to become revolutionary and to change Argentina’s political and social system.

Bonafini gives life to Guevara by saying that he always accompanies the Madres in their marches. His ideals are their ideals. To Bonafini, Guevara is the biggest Latin American accomplishment and gives him, even in his death, the responsibility to continue to be the light that illuminates all the revolutions. In this Tribute, Bonafini has come to praise, persuade, and defend.

In the next chapter, we’ll hear Bonafini’s reasoning for punishment of those responsible for the deaths as she describes in emotional details, the torture of the disappeared and the necessity of preserving the sanctity of memory.

## CHAPTER 5

### SPEECH 2: "I CALL FOR PUNISHMENT!"

In her 1988 Tribute to Che Guevara, Bonafini created a poetic vision of revolution. In this speech, "I Call for Punishment," she creates another vision, only it is one of persuasive logic calling for justice. This speech differs from the Tribute in many ways as the topic of motherhood includes the torture of the mothers as she describes the torture of their children. The context will first establish the foundation for her emotional and persuasive appeals, then a summary will establish her main ideas, followed by an analysis that reveals her reasons for calling for punishment and whom she wants to punish. Finally, a conclusion will review the major function of the speech.

#### *Contextual Overview*

In 1994, women from around the world met at a conference called Mothers Who Fight. The Mothers Who Fight were mothers of the disappeared from several Latin American countries, from the Sahara regions, mothers of children in the Ukraine who were victims of ecological crimes, women who joined together against the Mafia in Italy and against fascism in Israel, women who were trying to help the victims of the war in Yugoslavia and of repression in Palestine, Spanish mothers who supported their children in not joining the armed forces, or who banded together to save their children from drugs.

It was at this meeting that the Madres realized that their struggle in Argentina was part of a larger struggle all over the world had: the fight for life.<sup>1</sup> Steiner claims that the

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<sup>1</sup> See *Historia de Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, pp. 57-58.

Madres encouraged others to denounce imperialism and organizations that they believed supported it (215). It was also during this time that Bonafini's discourse included anti-American feelings in her written and spoken words. According to Alejandro Diago's (1988) interview with her, Bonafini's hatred for the United States was generated by her conviction that U.S. arms were behind the subjugation of the Argentine people and that "the Argentine military were educated like robots in the military doctrine of the United States" (215).

Bonafini's anger seemed to escalate when a book entitled *The Flight* was released in early 1995. The book exposed shocking details about the systematic flights that carried more than fifteen hundred people to their ocean deaths.<sup>2</sup> In an open admission of guilt, Lieutenant Commander Adolfo Scilingo<sup>3</sup> gave details of his role in the navy operations at the ESMA to Horacio Verbitsky, a renowned Argentine investigative journalist and human rights activist. The ESMA was the largest clandestine center and the only center to function for the entire length of the dictatorship. Called the Navy Petty Officers School of Mechanics (in Spanish, *Escuela de Suboficiales de Mecánica de la Armada*), the center was originally a legitimate military teaching institution. Located in the barrio of Nuñez, not far from Buenos Aires, the ESMA is where multiple instances of forced disappearance, torture and illegal execution, as well as appropriation of children born to mothers imprisoned there occurred.

Scilingo believed that the objective was to destroy the enemy, by whatever means and with the materials that were required. In order to gain information about the guerilla

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<sup>2</sup> *The Flight* also implicates the Catholic Church. Scilingo alleges that church officials approved the murders as a Christian form of death.

<sup>3</sup> On Oct 10, 1997, Scilingo was jailed in Spain after appearing to voluntarily testify on his crimes. He admitted to hurling thirty prisoners from airplanes during the state terrorism.

operations, officers subjected their prisoners to sexual assault, mock executions, and *la picana* (electric cattle prod). Once they obtained all the necessary information, the prisoners were disposed of via firing squads or *vuelos de muerte* (death flights). Scilingo participated in two of these flights, saying that he was convinced that they [the prisoners] were receiving vaccinations in preparation for transfer; prisoners were drugged and then dropped out of airplanes over the Río de la Plata (Verbitsky 18).

Verbitsky's book broke the pact of silence that surrounded the military junta's clandestine operations. By forcing the country to confront a past that had been buried under the weight of impunity policies and presidential pardons, his interview reintroduced these events to the public agenda (Feitlowitz 193). Bonafini made the book the focus of her speeches, and recalling the coup, she revealed that the mothers had come to a new and more radical stage in their evolution.

On March 1, 1995, Bonafini gave a speech in front of the Naval Mechanic School, one of an estimated four hundred concentration camps/torture centers that operated in Argentina during the dictatorship, to persuade the audience that the school should remain a monument to the deaths.<sup>4</sup> Her language of expression and vivid images describing the deaths of her children and other disappeared is accompanied by explosive revolutionary discourse. She brings Scilingo's confession into her speech and according to Steiner, she "uses it to revive interest in the disappeared" (Steiner 180). Her main ideas include an outline of the Madres' goals and the future of the ESMA building which will become a museum.

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<sup>4</sup> Later that same day, Bonafini gave a speech to the College of Law at the University of Buenos Aires. In this speech, she states that her speech in front of the ESMA was an "act of vindication" for their children (Steiner 181).

At this point, nineteen years had passed since the onset of the dictatorship, and she reminds the audience that the mothers were once just mothers searching for answers; they did not know their children were being tortured. Bonafini conveys her anger as she chooses words like corpse and revenge and hate. She reveals her anger for those who stand with the responsible for the tortures and those who have not been punished and finally reveals that the disappeared did not die in vain.

### *Message Analysis*

In this particular time period, just twelve years after the dictatorship ended, the period of mourning for the mothers has not ended, perhaps because it never occurred in the first place. Their resistance of the Argentine government, represented by Carlos Menem, is justified by Menem's attempt to reconcile the dictatorship without punishment. Bonafini reminds the audience of the obvious: that they are mothers who want justice for their children.

After greeting her audience, Bonafini begins by reminiscing that it had been nineteen years since the Mother met at the beginning of the dictatorship. She repeats nineteen years as she notes the differences in the reactions to the coup: some applauded, others wept, and others were indifferent. None of the mothers dreamed of today nineteen years ago. Her words tell a sad story for mothers—that the dreams they had for their children did not include torture and death.

The mothers are here “opposed to the death of this building, this building that we call ‘school.’” She states that the place should remain as a monument to horror and as a monument to death, as the largest monument to the greatest [worst] murderers who

stepped on our homeland. She personifies the building by saying that the mothers do not want the building to die and that they want the building to remain as a monument to horror and death.

The ESMA represents more than a building; it is more than a school. As the largest monument to the tortures, it represents a past that the Madres cannot forget. It is a memorial to the gruesome tortures, the deaths, and the human trafficking. She uses the testimony of Scilingo to prosecute him and others; creating vivid images and metaphors of motherhood and reappearing bodies.

She uses the term homeland instead of Argentina to give more emphasis to the murderers. Put in this context, the building becomes more than an institution and Argentina is perceived as more than just a country. Homeland signifies a place for mothers, not a place for murderers. This is a powerful metaphor that seems to exaggerate, but is she really exaggerating when so many people were tortured and killed in this building?

She continues her emotional appeal by describing a gruesome visual image. She says that what Scilingo said is not new to the Madres—that it was what the mothers said from the beginning. She says that the mothers knew about the drug pentonaval and they knew what was happening. Bonafini says that they also knew as their children's feet were put into soft cement, even though they were alive at the bottom of the Punta Indian aircraft, and when the cement dried, the children were thrown out of the plane. Bonafini's words are indicative of the silence that was imposed on Argentine citizens, and the realization that even though the mothers knew what was happened, very few believed

them. Her description of children's feet in soft cement creates an image of unusual cruelty, and the hardening of the cement emphasizes that image of cruelty.

She continues, "The corpses will reappear. Today, so many years away, again and again and again! And those corpses that appeared this time on the beaches of Santa Teresita<sup>5</sup> were examples that our children again, all the time back in everyone yells, revenge on each claiming; revenge on each of you!" In this graphic description, we see an image of corpses washing up along the beach, an emotional image she says that the children want revenge, yet Bonafini too wants revenge and the return of her children alive.

"They could not know the terror! They were thrown alive into the sea and could not know! They burned with glue and could not! They were buried down the highways and could not know!" Bonafini describes how the children must have felt as they were thrown alive into the ocean or burned or buried along the highways. Their innocence is preserved as Bonafini spells out their naiveté. She believes that those taken captive did not know what was occurring—they were blindfolded or drugged, so their incoherence would have prevented them from know what the end of their lives would be like. Again Bonafini describes a visual image of the deaths. She adds that she and everyone want revenge.

"We, their mothers, who took to the streets for almost 18 years, never thought that today in this sinister place we were going to say: Murderers, sons of a thousand whores: we hate!" Bonafini is incredulous that she and the Madres would come to this place and be able to say what they have wanted to say for many years, to label the place as sinister, and to announce in a public speech the hatred that they've harbored for so many years.

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<sup>5</sup> Santa Teresita, or Saint Theresa is small city on the coast of Argentina, north of Buenos Aires.

Hatred is voiced in her profanity; some might think this language unbecoming of a mother.

“The hate from the bottom of our hearts! The hate, and hate with equal force that we love our children!” The antithesis of those the Madres’ hate is the same depth of love that they feel for their children. This statement demonstrates a conflicting play on words—the hate from the bottom of our hearts. The hate is inevitable; she continues: “How can we fail to hate Scilingo and Vergez? We will never sit at your table, the table is because the damned of the murderers! It’s not surprising that she keeps mentioning Scilingo, but here she also mentions now retired army captain Hector Pedro Vergez. Sit at the table is an expression that means that the Madres will not negotiate in any way with these people. She states that she also has anger towards the Grandmothers and CELS (Center for Legal Studies), “who say they were seated next to them, which killed more than 30,000 people.” Bonafini is angry and accuses the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and CELS of working with those who are connected to these men.

When she mentions that the Madres will not accept money for the deaths of their children, she is firm on this—that “silver” will not take the place of the justice they demand. She is making reference to capitalism, then requests that economic repair [of the deaths] should never be promoted because “capitalism fixes it with silver.” Bonafini’s argument is not just about the offer of money to families of the disappeared, but that capitalism cannot fix what’s happened. Silver is an interesting choice of words; she doesn’t say money, but uses a term that means more than just money. For example, the early Spanish conquerors gave Argentina its name, which mean silver in Latin, because they thought they would find silver. In a Biblical sense, she may be making reference to



Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus with thirty pieces of silver. It also represents the capitalism she hates and connects to the U.S. In either sense, “silver” has powerful connotations.

Next she outlines the Madres’ plan of action, beginning with her argument that the disappearance of persons is a continuing offense, not just because it’s a crime against humanity, but because it’s against the law. This distinction is important for Bonafini because the Madres are requesting that Scilingo and Vergez be brought to trial; the Madres are “presenting to the doctor Barcesat of the League for the Rights of Man<sup>6</sup> and our lawyers to seek trial of Scilingo and now Vergez.” The Madres have demanded through the years that all involved with the disappearances be brought to trial, but this has not been an easy task. When the dictatorship fell, the various presidents have either pardoned or repealed pardons.

Bonafini brings her audience in to her argument when she identifies “so many young people and so many journalists who wanted to represent Rodolfo Walsh.” Walsh is the most famous of journalists in Argentina who spoke out against the dictatorship and was killed in 1977. She is making a tribute to Walsh and hundreds of journalists who also disappeared then again mentioned “our beautiful children” who “succumbed to the hands of those murderers.” Bonafini repeatedly calls those responsible for the deaths the murderers. This word is not an exaggeration for her. Typical of her speeches, she interrupts herself and speaks to her children, telling them [the Madres] that love is the biggest force. This seems an odd place to interject that sentiment, especially when she continues to discuss arms and human trafficking. The rhetorical effect is to position her

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<sup>6</sup> International League of Human Rights.

children as the major contributors to her words, including them as authors of what she's saying as if signaling their approval. In addition to arms trafficking, she is making reference to the babies born to mothers who were prisoners at ESMA.

She continues to speak directly to her children, telling them that they are proud of them. She creates another graphic illustration of their deaths, saying: "We know that inside here, on this ground here in what is called 'school,' where many young people come to do gymnastics, below the grass are the bodies of you." The image she creates is that of bodies piled below the ground where children are doing gymnastics.

She justifies this illustration by saying that the bodies have relevance today. Personifying their bodies as living, she claims that ideas "flourish in every youth who struggle." Her children's ideas are alive in the young people there today—everyone who dreams or has fantasies.

She leaves this illustration to paint a picture for mothers. She believes that every day there is a child born and there are flowers for the child; the child's mother has hopes born in freedom. Her addition of this segment of her speech is one that illustrates her own continued grief, and the hopes for freedom she had for her own children that can live in children born today. Children today have a change; mothers' hopes can be reality.

Next she announces an event that is going to occur on May 4<sup>th</sup> in the Plaza de Mayo—the day the trial that is scheduled for the "murderers." She gives power to the young people (young people are the judges to convict the murderers), calling them the judges who will condemn. She says there will be lawyers and there will be arguments and defenses will be indefensible. This paradox precedes her repeat of the youth today as the best judges who can "condemn better" because as the Madres' children taught them, they

want solidarity. This broad assumption is one that carries much weight with the Madres—that it is the youth who will sit in judgment of those responsible for deaths; it is the youth who will continue the work of their own children. She also mentions the large scarf built by architects that will be at the Plaza on May 4th. The fact that the Madres have built an enormous scarf structure shows the symbolic growth and power of the Madres at this point.

The next part of her speech is a declaration of the Madres' position and goals for their movement. Bonafini declares that they are showing the world “that there is no pardon, that there is no forgiveness, that there is no end point.” She is clearly stating that it won't matter what occurs. Justice will never be served for the mothers no matter who goes to trial, no matter how many exhumations there are, and no matter how many requests the mothers have. This declaration tells the audience that nothing will bring enough justice for them. This declaration sets the stage for her last request: for the audience to reject President Menem's plan for the torturers to confess to priests and not to publically recount what they've done.<sup>7</sup>

She ends her speech with an anaphora, saying that it is something she read many years ago which has great significance today. The anaphora is a series of phrases that ask for punishment [of those responsible]. She asks for punishment for their children; for those who put blood on the homeland; for the executioner who commanded the deaths; for the traitor who ascended to the crime; for those who gave the order for agony; for those who defended the crime.

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<sup>7</sup> New York Times article, March 30, 1995. “Argentine President Discourages New Revelations on ‘Dirty War,’” by Calvin Sims reveals that in a radio interview with President Carlos Menem who said that “publically coming forward to give testimony is a way of returning to a horrible past that we are trying to forget.”

She ends by saying that she does not want anyone to give her their hands soaked in blood; she asks for punishment. She does not want ambassadors<sup>8</sup> to sit quietly in their homes; she wants to see them here, tried, in this place. Her plan of action is for those responsible to be put on trial, and she wants her audience to support her and the Madres as they ask for punishment. This is their request for justice; however, as Bonafini has already stated, it will not be enough.

### *Summary*

This speech is about the need for justice—to console the past, to condemn the present, and to offer hope for the future. She uses graphic descriptions to have the audience visualize the tortures, the murders, and then creates an illusion of conflict the audiences' minds. How can children play where bodies are buried below?

Bonafini is dependent upon the young people—on a generation of youth that can solve the problem. She equates the young people of today with the young disappeared, another fusion of past and present. Her figures of speech are effective as she unravels her arguments. Her emotional appeals are more than a plea for justice; they seem to be questions that cannot be answered; grief that cannot be comforted; accusations that will never be judged. She wants the audience and the world to know that the Madres will not pardon, nor will they forgive, nor will they end their crusade for revenge.

Bonafini blames capitalism again in this speech, deeming it unable to fix what has occurred at the ESMA. She claims that the Madres do not want money; they want justice.

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<sup>8</sup> According to Magariños and Gauna, Bonafini is probably referring to the fact that sometimes Argentine governments appoint politicians who have committed crimes as ambassadors, so that they may leave the country and escape punishment.

This justice must include the trials of those responsible for murder. The hate of which she speaks is equal to the love she has for her children. “Love is larger, the force bigger!” In this Argentine culture of sadness and healing combined, Bonafini’s allusions to the past complete the significance of the historical reference of the building and the decisions made for its existence.

In her next speech, we will see how the Madres are rewarded for their work and how Bonafini further explains the reasons why the Madres are continue their work for political justice, not just for the disappeared, but for those all those who suffer.

## CHAPTER 6

### SPEECH 3: ACCEPTANCE SPEECH, UNESCO PRIZE FOR PEACE EDUCATION

The UNESCO prize for peace education was a significant accomplishment for the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Recognized internationally, they secured their position as a human rights movement. In this chapter, we look at Bonafini's 1999 acceptance speech and remember that she was once a housewife with no purpose other than taking care of her family. She connects the Madres to women world-wide, as she remembers the past years of resistance.

The goal of an acceptance speech is to offer an appreciation for the award and to create a climate of warmth. This may seem like a tall order for outspoken and aggressive Bonafini, but she relies on fact and emotional appeals, taking the opportunity to teach her audience about the Madres' work and to persuade her audience to accept the Madres' social and political positions.

#### *Contextual Overview*

The 1990s were a decade of change for Argentines. During this time period, neo-liberal economic policies, and privatizations brought general strikes, hunger strikes, and political party realignments.<sup>1</sup> The Argentine peso was equal to the U.S. dollar, and Argentina passed legislation that required 30% of candidates on party lists for Congress to be women. Roberto Viola, general and president during the state terrorism, died at age sixty-nine in 1996. In 1997 high unemployment caused protests and riots in various provinces outside of Buenos Aires: Neuquén, Jujuy, Salta, and Santa Fe. By December,

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see Argentina's timeline at <http://timelines.ws/countries/ARGENTINA.HTML>.

1999, Eduardo Duhalde, presidential candidate for the ruling Peronists, lost to center-left Alliance party candidate, Fernando de la Rúa, who campaigned for economic revival.<sup>2</sup>

Also in 1997, Argentina began issuing bonds to pay indemnities to the relatives and descendants of those killed during the dictatorship. Almost eight thousand families had applied for payments authorized at \$224,000 per victim. In 1998, President Carlos Menem ordered the navy to expel Alfredo Astiz, a former death squad officer. Astiz was sentenced in absentia to life in prison in France for the murder of the two French nuns who had disappeared in 1979.<sup>3</sup>

The late 1990s also saw a series of arrests of officers involved in the disappearances and torture. Ruben Franco, a former admiral, was arrested on charges of being a central organizer of the baby kidnappings. On January 22, a federal judge indicted seven former military officials for the disappearances of over two hundred babies during the 1976-1983 dictatorship.<sup>4</sup>

On December 14, 1999, eleven years after the “Tribute to Che,” the Madres were given the UNESCO award for Peace Education.<sup>5</sup> The award included a \$25,000 gift. The occasion presented an opportunity for Bonafini to review the history of the Madres

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<sup>2</sup> In September 1998, Argentina received World Bank loan of approximately \$4.5 billion to help stabilize the economy.

<sup>3</sup> In 2009, Astiz went on trial for the deaths of two French nuns, a journalist and three founders of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo; one of the Madres was Acuzena Villaflor.

<sup>4</sup> Ironically, in 1999 on March 16 in northern Argentina, a team of high-altitude archeologists discovered three frozen Inca mummies on Mount Llullaillaco—sacrificed children about 500 years ago.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The US\$25,000 UNESCO Prize for Peace Education was created in 1980 through a donation from the Japan Shipbuilding Industry Foundation. It promotes actions which increase public awareness and mobilize opinion in favor of peace. For more information see: [http://www.unesco.org/education/ecp/edprize\\_99.htm](http://www.unesco.org/education/ecp/edprize_99.htm). The Association of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo were given the UNESCO prize, but there were three other Honourable Mentions: Ms. Irene Drolet (Canada); Tubingen Association for Peace Education (Germany); and Congregation of the Daughters of Mary-Auxiliatrix in Angola.

organization and to tell her international audience of the Madres' unity with all mothers and to make known their positions as mothers to all children worldwide.

For this acceptance speech, she has been relegated to a highly credible position. Her ethos was established for her by the UNESCO award. By 1999, she was an expert on many international topics, particularly the oppressed. She was the president of the Madres' Association and had been the leader of the group for twenty-two years. At this point, she and the Madres had continued their resistance of Argentina's democracy for sixteen years.

In addition to the live audience at the award ceremony, the speech was more than likely carried on television, and was reported in newspapers and on the Internet. As promoters of peace education, her immediate audience would have been receptive to her message. Her secondary audience, those who may read this speech online or in the Madres' Bulletin, may or may not have an appreciation of Bonafini's discourse and the Madres' goals.

In this speech, Bonafini first established the Madres' movement longevity and the work that the Madres are trying to accomplish. She connects the suffering children of the world with the disappeared and blames capitalism. She strategically weaves the past with the present, subtly reminding her audience that the Madres are worthy of an international award.

### *Message Analysis*

After greeting her audience ("Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends, Comrades"), Bonafini remarks: "By your applause you have assured us that the path we have chosen is



the right one.” This confirmation of the Madres’ actions seems important to Bonafini—that their work is being recognized in a positive manner. If the mothers had any doubts, the award and the applause that they received assured Bonafini that what the Madres had chosen as their life-long work was the right decision for them; she appreciated the gesture of approval.

She reminds the audience that for the past twenty-two years, “every single Thursday, as if it were the only Thursday,” the Madres march around the Plaza de Mayo. It is important for Bonafini to explain the significance of the Thursday marches by pointing out that it is the only way that the mothers can restore contact with their deceased children and that it is the only way the mothers feel as though their children are still alive. Remembering the history of the Madres’ first silent march around the Plaza de Mayo in 1977, this metaphor of life is important for creating an understanding of why the Madres continue to march around the Plaza each Thursday at 3:30pm, wearing their scarves and holding banners.<sup>6</sup> In this particular way, their children have been reborn into society, and through the years, the mothers have been born of their children and into a position of motherhood for all children.

Bonafini continues, saying that the Madres were engaged in peace education from the very beginning without knowing it. They confronted the dictatorship by marching in silence around the plaza, “making an effort not to stay home and cry.” This proactive position of the mothers is a testimonial to their strength—that they sought unity and action and ignored their grief. They wanted to fight with purpose, even after acknowledging that their children would never return, they stayed in the Plaza de Mayo

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<sup>6</sup> The Madres ended their fight with the Argentine government in January 2006, claiming that “El presidente es amigo de Madres” and that they do not have an enemy in the Casa Rosada; however, they continue to march around the Plaza de Mayo in silence every Thursday at 3:30pm.

and continued their fight. Bonafini states that the mothers had to put motherhood in the center of society by becoming mothers to all. It is important to understand that the Madres consider themselves mothers of all children, not just their own.

Then she tells her audience that the mothers have traveled all over the world, both feeling and showing solidarity with all mothers in the world who are suffering—all mothers in the world who see their children die of hunger, bombing, wars and diseases due to poverty, saying that these things happen because the world is full of perversion. This claim that the world is full of perversion is one that establishes evil in the world, a cause that cries for necessary unity. This unity is dictated, in part, by the Madres' children, who told them that the only solution is to "stand together." Bonafini is bringing the memories of the Madres' children early into the speech to establish that the Madres are guided by their deceased children who direct the mothers to take action. By establishing the children as the foundation for the Madres' work, there is a question of where the credit goes: to the mothers or to their children?

She says that it is not easy to socialize motherhood, but that the mothers have done so in order to become everybody's mother. Socialized motherhood, mentioned earlier in this paper, implies that private motherhood has moved to the public realm. In this case, the Madres have taken their motherhood to the public sphere to become everyone's mother. This is an important position in Latin American society where, for many, motherhood is the ultimate authority. Bonafini claims that they are not just the mothers of their own children, but they are also the mothers of the thirty thousand missing children of Argentina, the fifteen thousand who were shot, the nine thousand

who were imprisoned and the million and a half exiles. The Madres have broadened their umbrella of motherhood by claiming motherhood to additional victims.

Next she says that the Madres have sought to represent mothers of thousands and thousands of children in other countries who have also been imprisoned. This type of representation allows the Madres and their children to be the ultimate authorities for thousands of mothers and their children. They have become the *Mater Dolorosa*—the mother of sorrows; the mother of all mothers and the mother of all sacrifices.

She brings the audience back to the present by saying that today with the perversion that is globalization and capitalism, the people who are now missing from the system are the people who have no work and who cannot feed their children. She calls these people the new drop-outs of the system, saying that the mothers also fight for them and that the mothers devote their lives to their cause. Bonafini has offered further definition of the term perversion by calling it globalization and capitalism. She blames capitalism for the new drop-outs of the system—people who have no work and who cannot feed their children. She has connected her children to the thousands and thousands of children who have been imprisoned, then connects these to the jobless who cannot feed their children. This circle of oppressed is meant to promote the unity of which she speaks—that of the disappeared, those imprisoned, and those jobless. The evil is perversion: capitalism and globalization. Capitalism is Bonafini's scapegoat; the purpose of establishing an enemy is to offer a savior who comes to the rescue.

Staying with the topic of capitalism, Bonafini explains that many people have tried to buy out the Madres and that they have had hundreds of offers. She says that they are not going to establish a new political party and they do not want anything for

themselves. This statement demonstrates the sacrifices the mothers have made, not wanting a monetary return on their investments of time and work. Bonafini's emotional words remind the audience that the mothers will never see their children again and although their children will not return to them physically, they believe that their children live again each time humans stand up and protest and that every time people show that their children existed. She is also reminding the audience of the denial that kept Argentines from believing that the disappeared existed. Many government officials during the dictatorship suggested that the mothers' actions were not justified—that their children had run off or disappeared on their own.

Bonafini is pleading for the lives of her deceased children by asking others to stand up and protest. This action will allow the children to “live.” This is an emotional and disturbing plea for the audience—suggesting that her children will remain dead if others do not help the mothers, and if they do not protest. The mothers also keep their children alive by giving them life in each one of their acts. She believes that even at the award ceremony—here this evening—she is sure that their children are inspiring the mothers and they stand beside the mothers. Bonafini believes that “revolutionaries never die because their actions represent something so fine, so united and so unthinkable that they cannot die.” She believes that “as long as there is a single person left to raise their voice, their children are still alive.” This business of keeping children alive is a theme that runs through her speech: keep the Madres' children alive by supporting the Madres' work; keep the children alive by supporting revolutionaries; keep the children alive by listening to their voices that are transmitted through Bonafini's voice. Her denial of agency allows for the children to speak, which become the prosopopoeia or

personification in which the absent is represented or speaking. Revolutionary has no negative connotation.

Bonafini is proud of the fact that the Madres' organization has not been bought out with financial compensation; the Madres believe that education goes hand in hand with ethics. The Madres also believe that they have to tell young people that their lives cannot be bought. In her next sentence, she says that the Madres' children's lives cannot be expressed in terms of money, and that there is no price to pay for the lives of those who have died for their people. This statement reminds the audience that the democratic government offered the families of the disappeared monetary restitution, something that the Madres would not accept. They will "not accept economic reparation" and demanded that their children be returned alive.

By insisting that their children be returned alive is asking for the impossible. It is obvious that the mothers want justice, but do they also want restitution? In Spanish, *restitución* can mean return. In English we think of it as compensation. So, their *restitución* means that they want their children returned. This request is a firm foundation for the Madres' work, and since it will never occur, given the Madres' a permanent platform for demanding justice.

Bonafini states that the Madres want justice and they want those responsible to be imprisoned, incarcerated, and to not have a travesty of justice that allowed those who are imprisoned to live in comfort in their own houses. This statement reflects Argentina's law that allows prisoners over seventy to live at home under house arrest. She also states that the Madres do not want tombs or monuments or those things linked to what she calls the trappings of death: war memorials, payment for those who are dead, exhumations, or

museums of death. This claim is a paradox of sorts because the Madres have established the Plaza de Mayo as their own territory for the memory of their children. They regularly post and circulate photos of the disappeared. They do not want a memorial or “museums of death” because she believes the children will live as long as the mothers keep their memories, their voices, and their beliefs alive.

Conveying more emotional appeals, Bonafini tells the audience that the mothers have fought their entire lives. They never thought their children could be dead and never imagined their children’s death, even though every day the Madres lived with their death. She admits that it is not easy to accept a death, especially when it is your own flesh and your own children who were tortured abominably while a whole nation remained silent and while no one raised their voice to say stop. The silence of which Bonafini speaks is a remorseful expression of resentment against those who would not speak up against the dictatorship. The military generals imposed fear on an entire country that imposed a silence that changed the entire Argentine culture which was once a gregarious and outspoken society. This notion of silence implied more than the lack of words or the lack of opportunity to speak. It implies a gagging or muzzling that occurred and that those who acknowledged or refused to stop it are the guilty parties. This also includes other countries that would not try to stop the dictatorship.

The Madres continue their fight so that what happened to their children will never happen again anywhere in the world and that there will be no more mothers and children, wives and young people who are forced to beg for charity. Bonafini is clear on these points. She says it grieves the mothers deeply because they cannot bear to see children living and dying in the streets—they feel ill and they feel helpless when they see a young

girl becoming a prostitute because she is the only one who can bring money back home. What can they say? They dare to ask her, what's happening and why are you on the streets and why aren't you going to school. Bonafini says there are no words to express what she feels. This part of her speech is in reference to a 1998 law that was repealed in Buenos Aires allowing prostitutes on the streets.

For this reason the Madres want to educate and prepare young people to go into politics and accept commitment; "politics is not synonymous with corruption—it is the people who corrupt politics and those corrupt people delude the Madres." Bonafini says that she wants to raise a generation of young people who will look at politics as the best form of human action and as something that will free us and lead us towards a better world and make us a better people. This, she says, is why the mothers are campaigning to launch the University of Mothers, and why they are working together and why they demonstrate every single Thursday and why they work every day. They don't care about threats and they don't care if people want to kill them.

She asks, what is life if not to carry forward their struggle and if it is not devoted to a cause? Their cause is the cause of their children, which means that they will love them until they die and feel that they are alive each day and that they will understand more deeply what their children gave them—gave them strength each day to get up and carry on the fight, to support mothers in the former Yugoslavia and mothers in Iraq, Peru, Colombia, Chile, and Brazil. The mothers will go where they are called because if they are what they are, it's because they have devoted their lives to the cause of other people, men and women. She says that the world does not begin and end in Argentina; it is all around the mothers. Then she asks the question of what have the mothers been speaking

about today? She answers: of perversion, state terrorism, and hunger. She explains again that this is why the mothers are fighting—because people are ruining the world and we need to be better people.

Bonafini then tells the audience what the Madres want; they want peace “with all of their hearts and souls,” but they also know that they should not go down on their knees begging for it. They must fight for peace with endurance and tenacity, holding their heads high, wearing their kerchiefs which symbolize life as they march around the Plaza de Mayo in solidarity with all who suffer. This sentiment is packed with meaning. The Madres have dignity; Bonafini needs to establish and reinforce their dignity as she connects to all who suffer.

Bonafini states that the Madres’ endeavor is to “create new human people who live for their people, who seek to free their people from oppression.” The Madres want these men and women to fight against capitalism because she says, capitalism is exploiting the work of so many others and the mothers want them to be honest, decent revolutionaries. Again revolutionaries’ connotation is positive. Her reification of the word is a great maneuver to strengthen her children’s ethos and to create a positive idea of revolution.

She concludes her speech with a quote by Chilean author Pablo Neruda, saying that the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo swear to continue their fight, raising their voices to support the cause of human dignity in the face of the abject, of hope in the face of the despairing, of justice against the unjust, of equality against the exploiters, of truth against the liars, and of great fraternity of all true combatants. The antithesis of these phrases



illustrate the continued struggle for the Madres, yet offer power to fight for what they believe is right.

### *Summary*

Bonafini wants a new society—one of revolution run by decent revolutionaries. She wants to create new human beings (birth) who seek to free their people from oppression (capitalism). She will not accept the death of her children and continues their revolutionary fight. She blames those who were silent when her children were tortured and because she is a mother, she endures all sorrow. The Madres are mothers to all children, and Bonafini has indirectly given birth to the idea of a new society. The symbolic headscarf, once an icon of birth, now takes on a new meaning: birth of a new social order.

The Madres seek unity so that motherhood will hold a central position in society. By becoming mothers to all children, they become the mothers of all mothers. They have solidarity with all mothers who want justice. They want restitution, but not of monetary value. Their restitution comes in the way of establishing a new society—one free of perversion, one free of capitalism. At this point she does not yet mention socialism.

In this speech, Bonafini accepts the responsibility to uphold the sanctity of motherhood around the world. As a metaphor, motherhood represents a blanket of protection for all children. Her children have become ghosts that speak and live through the Madres.

Bonafini has confronted the evil and new perversion: capitalism. She blames capitalism for poverty and hunger. She connects the past with the present. Hers and the

Madres work for peace education has been rewarded; they have the proper notoriety and confidence in their mission. Motherhood is a public issue; their socialization of it gives them a platform from which they will continue their crusade for justice.

In the next chapter, we will see more fully how important motherhood in connecting with the oppressed as we sample one of Bonafini's speeches from one of the yearly Marches of Resistance.

## CHAPTER 7

### SPEECH 4:” EL OTRO SOY YO” (“I AM THE OTHER”)

This particular speech, delivered in March 2002, outlines one of the Madres’ slogans that emphasize their major philosophy of connectedness to all oppressed. The title is an appropriate description of what follows: “I am the Other.”

As mothers, the Madres continue to consider themselves mothers of all suffering in Latin American. Bonafini’s motto is “el otro soy yo.” “The other is me” is an expression that reestablishes Bonafini’s philosophy seen in her UNESCO acceptance speech which too represents the ideology of the religious mater dolorosa, the sorrowful mother, keeper of all suffering.

The speech outlines the Madres’ slogan and major philosophy of connectedness to all oppressed. The chapter begins with an overview sets the stage for this speech given at one of the Madres’ yearly marches of resistance. An analysis of the speech is followed by a summary of Bonafini’s major points.

This chapter begins with an overview that sets the stage for this speech given at one of the Madres’ yearly marches of resistance. An analysis of the speech is followed by a summary of Bonafini’s major points. The relevance for the speech unfolds as Bonafini blames various entities for Argentina’s economic situation.

#### *Contextual Overview*

Most writers cite the December 19-21, 2001, middle-class uprising that ousted President De La Rúa as a turning point in Argentine history. Many too have speculated about the causes of the crisis, but the end result was disastrous. In the early to mid 1990s,

the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had hailed Argentina in applying neoliberal policies promoted by the IMF for emerging economies. By 2001, Argentina was in a deep economic crisis and unemployment was approaching twenty percent (Stiglitz 2002). By December 2001, the IMF denied continued assistance to Argentina and in the same month, Argentina defaulted on the \$141 billion debt. In one year Buenos Aires fell from being the most expensive city in Latin America to the cheapest city (*Latin Trade* 2003).

Since the late 1990s there had been an unusual number of protests; the most notable were the unemployed workers, the piqueteros (picketers). These protesters blocked major roads and highways in demand of government subsidies and welfare measure. Most of these demands had been made following the March 2001 economic crisis that had followed a three-year recession. By November 2001, Argentines began withdrawing millions of pesos and dollars from their financial accounts—an estimated \$13 billion.

By December, De la Rúa was forced to resign and three presidents were appointed within three weeks.<sup>1</sup> There were joint marches of the organized unemployed and sectors of the middle class neighborhood associations. The populace in Buenos Aires, at one point, even stormed the Congress. Likewise in the provinces, they invaded the legislative assemblies, tossing furniture out the windows in their rage at the venality and unresponsiveness of the legislature and the party bosses who controlled the electoral processes and elected representatives.

So by March 2002, the sting of the crisis was still very much on people's minds. Hundreds had come to the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, March 24, 2002, in memory

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<sup>1</sup> Ramón Puerto interim December 21-22, 2001; Adolfo Rodríguez Saá December 22-30, 2001; Eduardo Camaño interim December 31-January 1, 2002; Eduardo Duhalde January 2, 2002 to May 25, 2003. Néstor Kirchner 2003– 2007. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 2007-present.

of the twenty-sixth anniversary of the coup. Buenos Aires is known by many as the city of protest; the Plaza de Mayo is a main stage for protestors. The supporters were all there; other protest organizations were there. The Madres had taken possession of this Plaza every Thursday at 3:30pm for the last twenty-five years; their banners were strung along the front of their march; their tables held their flyers, books, buttons, and other artifacts. The white scarf, their trademark, is also their new sign that dangles over the café on the street of Hipólito Yrigoyen. Their university campus is just two blocks from the Congressional building in downtown Buenos Aires.

Through the years, Bonafini has spoken for the Madres, as president of the Madres Association. She is also the spokesperson for the disappeared, and she uses the authority of her admiration of Che Guevara, Marx, and other Latin American revolutionaries. She has sat at the table with Hugo Chávez, president of Venezuela, who calls himself the son of the Madres, and she calls Fidel Castro “my commander.”<sup>2</sup> Her authority is also heard in her assertive and accusatory declarative statements. She does not speak in individualism, but in a collective voice, a collective consciousness. She does not speak for or about her children; she does not advocate for them; but again using prosopopeia, she speaks *through* them.

Bonafini’s greeting tells us who was in the audience: “Companions, fellow picketers, colleagues of neighborhood assemblies, beloved Mothers, children, men, and women of the University, colleagues from the Library, the Literary Cafe, the radio stations, those who turn me on all sides to take a picture or give a kiss to the Mothers.”

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<sup>2</sup> In the online article at [venezuelanalysis.com](http://venezuelanalysis.com), “30<sup>th</sup> Mercosur (Common Market of the South) Summit was held in Cordoba, Argentina in July 2006. Member countries are Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, and Venezuela. Also attending: Castro, Bolivian Pres. Evo Morales, and Chilean Pres. Michele Bachelet. Bonafini, along with Castro and Chavez, gave a speech at the closing of the official summit.

She will remind her audience of the dictatorship, and as the mothers of the disappeared, she and the Madres convey a natural moral authority. Bonafini's defense is also her attack. Her intent is persuasion; her goal revolution. At this time in 2002, the Madres have resisted the Argentine democracy for nineteen years.

### *Message Analysis*

Bonafini is incredulous that it has been twenty-six years since the coup and that the Madres are still in the Plaza de Mayo. She gives praise to those who are not ashamed of being revolutionaries, allowing them all to feel at ease with their positions as human rights' activists. In keeping the memory of the coup alive, especially on this twenty-sixth anniversary, she criticizes the military generals responsible for the coup. Many have been brought to trial and sentenced to life imprisonment, including priests and Isabel Perón, but in Argentina, if prisoners are over seventy, they are allowed to stay at home under house arrest. She says they are "locked up in their caves." By using the word cave instead of house or home, she creates a metaphorical uncivilized image. This image is supported by her hyperbole: "And if they ever attempt to rejoin and try to give a coup, we, all the necessary ones, will die for the revolution, the motherland, for the socialism."

This is the beginning of her argument—that the Madres and supporters will fight, if necessary, for the freedom of the revolution and socialism for the "the motherland." The term motherland has many connotations, especially in light of the Madres' political positions. Motherland can imply the main land or it can imply mothers' land. She connects their solidarity to the fight for revolution—they must all fight together. They

need to have the determination to fight something that strong, to be loyal to the socialism they praise.

She sets up another persuasive argument by saying: “It is not enough to sing the march, not enough to lift a fist, not enough to bring red flags, not enough to bring the banners of the Che, not enough to put on the shirt.” Chanting is common at the Madres’ rallies, singing and carrying the banners, and to wear a shirt with a picture of Che Guevara on it. She is asking for more than physical support; she wants mental, philosophical and emotional support.

After stating that it is not enough, in a moment of antithesis, she states: “It’s enough that we question ourselves each morning what do to, so that the sons of bitches do not speak anymore, don’t leave anymore, or they don’t occupy the Government House.” Ironically, Bonafini is calling for the silence and absence from the generals—a twist in political power from a government that once silenced an entire country.<sup>3</sup> Her profanity reveals her disgust.

Bonafini admits that they are living in a difficult moment referring to the economic crisis. She thanks the neighborhood assemblies (those working with children, building homes, etc.) and in a brief positive moment, she has hope. At this point in the Madres’ movement, they have established projects throughout Buenos Aires, especially working with the poor, feeding hungry children, and working to free political prisoners.

“Deaths are never useless” she states, thinking of the night of the siege. Then she suddenly speaks to her dead sons, as if there is no crowd: “How wonderful my children, my dear sons! How wonderful that we all came on the 19<sup>th</sup> and said no to the siege.” She speaks to her sons as if they are still alive and creates an emotional image of her sons, to

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<sup>3</sup> Her words are reminiscent of John F. Kennedy’s Second Inaugural Address.

remind the audience that she is still a grieving mother. She is setting up a persuasive platform for confrontation against the enemy. In the beginning with her children, the enemy was the coup; however, as the speech progresses, another scapegoat appears.

She suggests again that the dictatorship might return and that they need strength to always come back [to retaliate]. They will come back to the Plaza, for which she now claims ownership. The metaphor of the Plaza being a home to the dead is one that presents an image of life. She personifies her deceased children who have become the revolutionary ghosts of the Plaza. She says that the reason the Madres meet on each Thursday is because their children are still there. She says that even when they arrived, the children were telling them that they [Madres] are “doing good to do everything that is necessary to denounce not only the military, the politicians, union, bureaucrats, to traitors, to those sold, the corrupt, and above all the traitors.” These are direct instructions. She establishes the voices of the children and creates a vision of them so the audience can see the parallel vision of the Madres. Keeping the children alive is a persistent trait of the mothers.

Bonafini can feel the children’s spirits fluttering around and then like a shaman, she casts the spirits into the audience: “In each one of you live one of them, in each of you live one of the 30,000...” She has put an enormous weight on her supporters; the entire weight of the disappeared is now their responsibility. She is transferring the unity of motherhood to the solidarity of a mothering audience, of caretaking; the audience now becomes surrogate mothers for the disappeared. She gives superior credit to the Madres’ resistance march and followers stating that no matter how many are there, they are the



“strongest, bravest, most convinced, most revolutionary.” Her words are like a victory speech before battle, an illustration of confrontation.

Bonafini is unifying her children to all of Latin America—the Madres have become the mothers of all Latin American struggles. Ironically, what we might understand as a negative ethos of FARC<sup>4</sup> in the United States. Bonafini uses the organization for positive ethos. Her discourse in other speeches associates the Madres with revolutionary “guerillas,” glorifying the Argentine icon, Che Guevara, leader of anti-imperialism ideology throughout Latin America.

A common pattern of Bonafini’s is to give a series of cheers; she cheers FARC, the landless, the Bolivian coca leaf gatherers, Paraguayans, these silent companions, those comrades who are fighting on earth! She raises pathos by elevating the supporters who risk their lives. “That they are willing to put up their life and body for “this thing so beautiful” [the thing is revolution] and to live thinking that “another world is possible” [socialism]. Next, she restates that all revolutionaries are children, persuading her audience to join the fight for another world. She sets up strategic emotional appeals—they and the supporters are now all mothers; all revolutionaries in Latin America are the children. She unifies then creates a vision of a new world.

In her closing statements, it is the slogan that carries the most persuasive power. Here is what Bonafini wants of her audience, what she is persuading them to do: “We must accompany all the struggles, we must feel, companions, once and for all, that *the*

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<sup>4</sup> FARC is a leftist guerrilla group that, for the last forty years, has tried to stage an overthrow of the government in Colombia, financed by drug trafficking, tortures and kidnapping. FARC has been branded as a terrorist group by the US state department and the European Union, but is also known for its roots in the inspiration of Che Guevara. FARC has been accused of recruiting underage teenage girls who are forcibly used for combat against Colombian security forces and who are forced to give sexual favors to the on-ground commanders. When pregnant, most of them are forced to abort by chemical or mechanical ways. If they keep the pregnancy, the child is taken away months after birth. Many of them end up in Colombian child-welfare system.

*other is me* and the kids said so every day.” This then is not the Madres’ voice, but the voice of their children who tell them they must be everything to everybody—it is the revolutionary way—to be the mother of all of revolutions, to all causes. The Madres are submissive to their children who told her that it is only when “people realize that people are also them, only then they’ll go a step.” In other words, others’ problems must become internalized.

She chants four times: “The other is me.” Then she tells who the other is. “The picketer is me, the revolutionary me, that’s me taking the factories, those who do not eat are me, we are all myself a few others, we are going back and forth, there’s where we are!” This repetition calls out Bonafini’s perfect union of “me” and the “other.”

She states that many come to the Plaza for many reasons, but they have to understand that “there is one enemy, the International Monetary Fund, the large multinationals and the servants who are in this country. They are the enemies of us all.” At this point, the confrontational rhetoric appears in full force. She has peppered it throughout the speech, making allusions to the enemy, but now she spells out the evil (the traitor, the enemy), saying that they must fight for the Plaza, fight for lack of work, those who stole the money—it is all the same enemy. She reiterates that there are millions and millions of reasons, but there is only one enemy.”

She is confronting the evil of capitalism, the scapegoat, in her final statement: the banks have become millionaires. She personifies the bank to make it a human agent, then finalizes her argument with a proverb: it’s much more of a crime to open a bank than to rob it.” Her ending line is symptomatic of the problems she sees—the need to distribute the concentrated wealth.

It is the ultimate mother argument—the confrontation against evil—the IMF, the economic forces that will not allow children to eat. “The Other is Me” is a speech that not only re-emphasizes the Madres’ fight for justice of those responsible for the deaths of their children, it intertwines past, present, and future, using the elements of the rhetoric of restitution and the rhetoric of revolution. It captures the memory and offers a blend of connectedness, a binding of ideals of the Madres’ children to the Madres’ “comrades”—FARC, Che Guevara, and others, and a call to denounce the International Monetary Fund—to see anti-imperialism as a just cause, and to support the Madres and more importantly their deceased children in seeing the fruition of their goals—a revolution that brings socialist principles and distribution of wealth to Argentina and all of Latin America.

Bonafini can gain this through redeeming her children’s revolutionary ideas in Argentina’s democratic society. She elevates her children’s status so that their deaths were not useless. She argues for justice. She argues to keep the memories of their children alive. She wants support from her audience, to not just “sing and march” but to “reach out every morning and plan whatever is necessary and do what they can so that the “sons of bitches can’t speak, can’t get out again and do not occupy the government house.” She is calling not only for the silencing of the responsible, but for the restriction to any political decisions. Her aggressive radical voice has developed through years of unanswered questions and unresolved issues, including lack of justice.

Although from Bonafini’s speech it would seem that the Madres have many enemies, but it could be that their main oppressor is not the Argentine government, not the U.S., not poverty, not military dictators, but the Madres’ own children, the ones who

are speaking for the Madres. They are the voices that are keeping the Madres from experiencing their own voices. They are the oppressors that prevent the Mothers from moving out of a victim stance of mothers who lost their children.

Bonafini's social statement is one of revolution, in all manners affecting the economic status of Argentina and all of Latin America. She does not speak specifically for women, but wants to fuse all people and struggles, that her comrades' struggles are theirs—the same sentiment that her children told her every day. Marxist ideology is clear in Bonafini's speech, that economic conditions are the cause of the current problems, and it is clear that she is voicing the opinion of her children who believed in this ideology, clear that the enemy is money and the Monetary Fund who she claims are ruling Argentina. Money is the enemy; socialism is the savior.

Bonafini believes that there is one common enemy, the Monetary Fund, large multinationals and its servants who are in this country. They are enemies of us all.” This is her scapegoat and is also just one of the many enemies of whom she speaks. As a comrade of Fidel Castro, Bonafini might very well use Castro's rhetoric. In a speech in 1960, “Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death,”<sup>5</sup> he uses a theme of the enemy repetitiously, much like Bonafini does in her speech. Perhaps her repetition is planned; perhaps it's added for immediate effect. It is hard to tell if she intends for her words to be repeated ceremoniously or if she gauges the reaction of her audience. Castro, like Bonafini, also mentioned fraudulent elections as part of a bigger social problem (Brandes 138).

Bonafini demands peace for her dead by way of legal punishment and the return of the dead to life; she wants restitution via revolution and she sentences herself to fight

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<sup>5</sup> According to Brandes, this title is loosely translated.

forever. Hers is a life sentence because tragedy has no real solution and her children have not been returned. Still, she has encompassed a higher wisdom, a higher love, one that Herbert Simons claims is necessary of all militant leaders. She speaks from “mother” power—a power of love. She visualizes the goal of unity and revolution by creating the confrontational platform. The overall premise of her speech is that the Madres are internalizing human rights issues of others; your problems are our problems. Like Antigone (confronting the corpse of her unburied brother) the Madres demand peace for their dead by way of legal punishment or the return of their dead to life; they sentence themselves to fight forever—the Madres’ task is eternal for they embody a situation that has no solution: that of tragedy (Calderón 20). The mothers’ unity resides on a personal and political level. Their perpetual bond is one born of motherhood; they are me; I am they.

The overall premise of her speech is that punishment, restitution, revolution, anti-imperialism, and socialism are all linked by the memories and ideologies of her children. She has established her revolutionary role, one in which she and the Madres do not fully accept as their own, but one in which they see Guevara as the leader, and their children and others as the followers.

### *Summary*

This speech is significant as the Madres’ movement continues their goal of socialist revolution. Since the beginning of their movement, a fundamental change has occurred; they are still grieving mothers, but their goal is to keep their children alive and

to make clear the pertinent ideas of what their children wanted. Her discourse and the Madres' university illustrate their intentions for future revolutionaries.

The personal image of mothers in Argentina is common—to be relegated to the position of caretaker. In Latin America, where the Catholic Church strongly influenced social thought, reformers frequently invoked maternalism to support liberal feminist demands for education and equal rights (Freedman 67). In part, the power of motherist groups such as the Madres arises from their ability to draw upon the feminine imagery of Catholicism against the state by evoking the image of the suffering mother and her sacrifice (Radcliffe and Westwood 18).

Now in 2002, Bonafini and the Madres have successfully established the university and business. She states that she wants revolution—she uses the ideological voices of her disappeared children who died for revolution. Again she emphasizes revolution as the end to imperialism. Bonafini knows that she cannot bring back the disappeared, and that her children are gone, but she is committed to the eternal struggle for social justice.

El otro soy yo is a symbolic strategy for a heightened emotional appeal, a union of being “one.” At this continuation stage in their movement, the speech transforms the goals of the Madres, issuing their strategy to change the existing order in not only Argentina, but all of Latin America. Bonafini does not allow the Madres' movement to end; in her speeches she keeps the memory of the desaparecidos alive, and is subversive to their revolutionary ideology. “As long as we are alive, they are alive.”

This speech highlights the nature of the Madres' cause for unity of motherhood for the purpose of confrontational argument. Her rhetoric is antagonistic to some, but

offers validation for others. She is a spokesperson for political justice and her discourse is confrontational and intertwining past and present, beginning with unity and ending with a plea for revolution for all of Latin America. This particular speech offers a unique and peculiar significance. Bonafini has, in former speeches, connected her children to the Madres' marches. She has mentioned Che Guevara, anti-imperialism, socialism, and the like, but in this particular speech, she more visibly exposes the bond of identities that she and the Madres have crossed and that she is wanting her audience to cross too. In other words, this speech combines, in an unusual fashion, her arguments for creating and sustaining socialism by losing one's individualism.

It is important to remember that although movements almost always conceive of themselves as outside and opposed to institutions, or in this case, the Madres against democracy, collective action often inserts them into complex policy networks (Tarrow 25). According to Tarrow, movements enunciate demands in terms of frames of meaning that are comprehensible to a wider society; they use forms of collective action drawn from an existing repertoire, and they develop types of organizations which often mimic the organization they oppose (25).

In the next and final speech of this study, Bonafini spells out the Madres' goals and their dislike for the most evil country of all, the United States.

## CHAPTER 8

### SPEECH 5: “WE BELIEVE IN REVOLUTION; WE BELIEVE IN AND LOVE SOCIALISM!”

As we saw in the last speech, the Madres’ agenda has reached far beyond their original movement goal of finding the disappeared. This speech was given in 2003; the title is “We Believe in Revolution; We Believe in and Love Socialism.”

In this speech, Bonafini openly states her dislike of the United States and the International Monetary Fund. She claims that Cuba is in a permanent revolution and that the only way for Latin America is the revolution. She brings the disappeared to her speech and states that the Madres are not going to let the children die. She is very clear about what the Madres have become and what they want: revolution and socialism.

The contextual overview explains the history of the speaking event and the main points of her speech, then an analysis of her speech will follow and a summary recapitulates the theme of the speech.

#### *Contextual Overview*

There is a celebration at the College of Medicine on July 26, 2002,<sup>1</sup> in Santiago de Cuba. The celebration is in recognition of National Rebellion Day, a day of a remembrance of a guerilla rebel attack led by Fidel Castro which began the Cuban Revolution in 1953. The assault failed and most of the rebels were killed. Castro and his brother Raúl were jailed for twenty-two months. After they were freed, Castro went to

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<sup>1</sup> Preceding Bonafini’s visit, ex-U.S. president Jimmy Carter had visited Cuba on May 2002 to denounce allegations of bioterrorism at the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology in Havana. Carter spoke to the Cuban people in Spanish; his speech was seen on national television.



Mexico where he organized the expedition of Yacht Granma which arrived in Cuba to begin a guerilla war in the Sierra Maestro Mountains. Exactly five years and five days after the assault on Moncada, the rebels took control of Cuba from the Batista dictatorship on January 1, 1959, beginning the socialist period in Cuba. It was in Mexico where Fidel Castro met revolutionary Che Guevara. Bonafini was at this celebration, forty-nine years after the assault at Moncada Barracks.

Because we already know that the Madres are teaching classes in revolution at the Universidad Popular in Buenos Aires, and we know that the Madres' hold Che Guevara in high esteem, and we know that Bonafini's anti-imperialist rhetoric is heard in her former speeches, it comes as no surprise that Bonafini will speak about the Madres' love of revolution and socialism at this occasion. She is wearing her white scarf, a sign of authority and a trademark of longevity, speaking out against the United States, and in this speech, she gives credit for the Madres' work and Latin American colleagues' work.

### *Message Analysis*

After thanking the ambassador and his wife for the warm welcome and for the invitation to be a part of the tribute to Cuba, Bonafini's topic turns immediately to the disappeared children. This is her pattern, to bring her children and other disappeared to the event. She connects the work of their disappeared children to the Madres' revolutionary work. This too is a pattern; the Madres' work is their children's work. This introduction establishes her ethos and by giving credit to the children, she establishes her own credibility as a mother. The revolutionary work of which she speaks is the protests against the dictatorship, democracy, and capitalism.

Bonafini always wears her white scarf. It is a symbol of motherhood and peace. As a role model for mothers' protest movements, she is often outspoken about the use of the Madres' symbol of white. When a Cuban organization of women called The Ladies in White rose up in protest in 2003 during what's now called Black Spring, the Cuban government arrested, tried, and sentenced seventy-five human rights defenders independent journalists, and independent librarians to terms of up to twenty-eight years in prison. The seventy-five were accused of "acts of independence of the territorial integrity of the state," including belonging to "illegal organizations," accepting money from the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, and "terrorist activities," and collaborating with foreign media.<sup>2</sup>

The Ladies in White group was formed two weeks after the arrests and as the relatives of the prisoners began gathering on Sunday at St. Rita's church in Havana to pray for the relatives, the women began a procession from the church to a nearby park. They wore their symbolic white clothes much like the Madres wear their white scarves. In an interview, Bonafini criticized their use of white, saying that "Our white scarf symbolises life while those women, that you are talking about Ladies in White, represent death." Bonafini went on to remark that "the so-called Ladies in White defend the terrorism of the United States, the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo symbolise our love for our children who were murdered by tyrants imposed by the United States."<sup>3</sup>

Wearing her white scarf here in Cuba, Bonafini says that the mothers talked of revolution when nobody spoke [about it] because they believed in it. She adds that the Madres believe in it because it is not violent. To better understand this statement, "the

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<sup>2</sup> See Human Rights First, [http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/defenders/hrd\\_cuba/hrd\\_cuba\\_blanco.htm](http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/defenders/hrd_cuba/hrd_cuba_blanco.htm).

<sup>3</sup> See Apporrea web site interview with Bonafini: <http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a15093.html>.

revolution” must be labeled as socialist revolution, or an ideology revolution which in itself does not include physical violence. In support of her statement, she gives an example: “If not, look to the Cubans. There are no happier people.” In repetition, she repeats this last sentence: “There are no happier people.”

Bonafini believes that Cuba is in a permanent revolution because they [the people] defend what they want and what they love. She persuades her audience, telling them that “we must learn to talk of revolution, to become revolutionaries, and to not be afraid of armed struggle or the guerrillas.” This sentence illustrates her leadership qualities; she sets up the goal, and then addresses the fear that might accompany the struggle. Her audience knows that she is an authority on fear, so her words offer comfort. She adds that the Madres love their colleagues in Latin America who raise their arms to defend their own people. The word “raise” is used in various ways in her speeches: raise the flag, raise the fist, and now raise their arms. It is a term with many connotations, and the implication is that physical assertion is necessary. Bonafini is asking her audience to rise up and not to be afraid to rise up. She gives praise to her Latin American colleagues who are doing this to “defend their own people.” Latin American protests are a common occurrence and come in variations. The synthesis of ideas from contemporary Marxist and feminist traditions and their transformation into a concrete political strategy for social change has become a high priority for a growing number of Marxists and feminists in Latin America, especially in Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Brazil, Chile, and the Dominican Republic (Chinchilla 38).

Continuing the speech in what’s become her tradition, Bonafini begins to talk about the Madres’ children, the Madres’ “dear and beloved children who gave their blood

for the people.” She mentions the thousands and thousands of friends who gave their blood and says that they had wonderful blood. By giving their blood, she is saying that they are giving their lives—their wonderful lives. Blood too has several connotations, but here she is surely meaning lives.

Bonafini comments that the Madres are not going to let the children die, nor will they sell the blood that feeds them. She is speaking of the children that they won’t let die and says they will not die while there is one fist that is lifted. She speaks in symbolism and metaphors. Blood represents life; selling blood represents the democratic government’s offer to make monetary restitution for the families of the disappeared.

She follows this with the statement: We believe in the revolution; we believe and love socialism. As the title of her speech, this sentence describes what the Madres have become and what they want. They want revolution; they want socialism. Why? For the reasons given: happiness, dignity (rise up), and to protect the memories and ideals of their disappeared. Is there ever a more touching tribute to their children?

Bonafini claims that the Madres know that the only way for Latin America is the revolution and that although Latin America is given “bourgeois elections” she knows that it isn’t the way that Latin American is going to achieve revolution. She is distrusting of the democratic elections, distrusting of the Argentine government officials who buy their way into office.

Her next argument is one that is also a pattern: the Madres repudiate and are revolted by the [International] Monetary Fund, and by what she calls the most terrorist country in the world: the United States. She re-affirms that the U.S. is the most terrorist country and adds that it is the one that invades most countries, blocks most countries, and

kills the most people. Because of the economic crisis of 2001 and subsequent unemployment and poverty, we might understand why she mentioned the IMF. Her dislike of the U.S. is also a pattern.

To understand this last statement, we can look at her past remarks after the September 11 attacks on the Twin Towers. Bonafini was in Cuba during that time, but later she presented a clear image of avenging her children's death when she delivered a speech at the People's University during a public presentation on the imperialist war, declaring that she was happy about the attacks: "I felt that there were many peoples who had been avenged."<sup>4</sup> In this same speech, Bonafini suggested an empathic relationship with those would be the new victims.

But the propaganda is so brutal, they have so much in their hands, that they themselves and many agencies have said, North Americans in power first lie to their people. The powerful lie so much that they people believe it and then they can do what they want since they have the trust of the people, just like what happened here. Like Vinas said, our children were terrorists, and many people stayed quiet because they believed that it was acceptable to kill terrorists, since if they were terrorists what else could be done? Terrorism. Then, we were the mothers of terrorists. We spoke and spoke but many people said: no, but they make bombs. We suffered many years; we spend much of our lives maintaining that our children were revolutionaries, raising them to the highest level possible, making the people believe that they donated and handed over their lives for a better world, so that we could speak, live, sustain them, defend them, and go on fighting. (Marchesis)

Bonafini's explanation follows a precarious line of reasoning that the terrorist attacks on the United States were similar to the terrorism in Argentina. To her, the trust of the government is the major problem when a government cannot be trusted.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Taken from *Resumen Latinoamericano*, No 14, accessed at <http://nodo50.org/resumen>.

<sup>5</sup> Marchesis claims that this analysis offers excessive Manichean use of the category "imperialism" in the 1960s and 1970s, which gave no autonomy to local actors and viewed them simply as puppets of the great powers. Marchesis also believes that this has been shown to be insufficient to explain a much more complex and dense relationship between the U.S. and Latin American countries.

So in Santiago de Cuba in 2003, Bonafini continues along this thread by claiming that it is a lie that the U.S. is a democratic country, and re-states that the U.S. is the most terrorist country. She says it makes the Madres sick and the mothers loath that U.S. delegates are allowed into Argentina.<sup>6</sup>

She ends her speech by saying that it is not necessary to pay the debt [IMF] and that Argentina does not have to pay anything. She states that the U.S. must pay Argentina and that the U.S. must allow the Argentines to live their lives over, then they will receive the payment. According to Bonafini, the U.S. owes Argentina much. She is in Cuba at a celebration of the Cuba Rebellion, yet she repeatedly denounces the United States. Is she doing this because of her dislike for democracy, capitalism, or both?

### *Summary*

By 2003, Bonafini's patterns have been established and are illustrated in her speeches, particularly this one. She continues to use motherhood as a metaphor and her past history shows that she covets the color white. She continues to praise the disappeared, giving credit to them for their work for the revolution. With this close reading there are no hints; there are few subtleties.

She continues to blame the United States and the International Monetary Fund. Her dislike of capitalism seems like the antithesis of socialism. The U.S. is evil; socialism is good. Her claims are supported as she introduces the happy Cuban people into her argument for socialism. She relies heavily upon the disappeared for their involvement

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<sup>6</sup> As a U.S. researcher in Buenos Aires in 2008, this thought had also crossed my mind, so much so that during an interview with Madre Elsa Manzotti at the Casa de Madres, I wondered about my presence. Manzotti told me that the Madres do not dislike the people of the United States; they disagree with the U.S. government.

with guerilla revolution; she persuades her audience to stand up for revolution and to not be afraid. She does not mention Che Guevara, although his influence on the disappeared and the Madres is implied. She is a mother first, a revolutionary next, and a then is a celebrity who continues to tell the story of terror, making the terrorists the United States, her current scapegoat.

Next, Chapter 9 offers a discussion of the major rhetorical strategies we've seen in the five speeches presented. We will see that Bonafini's patterns become clearer as they are brought forth, categorized, and explained further.

## CHAPTER 9

### DISCUSSION OF RHETORICAL STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE

This chapter begins with a general discussion of how the loss of their children affected the Madres ability to grieve and mourn. I will argue that this particularly anguishing loss created a set of circumstances, or rhetorical exigencies that called forth certain responses from the largely uneducated, typically homebound mothers, and especially Hebe de Bonafini. These are: motherhood and birth metaphors and the symbol of the headscarf; denial of the Madres' agency and the use of prosopopoeia as a means for their children to achieve rhetorical agency; and scapegoating. Drawing these specific themes together, I will introduce my own conclusion that goes beyond the analysis.

#### *Motherhood Metaphor and the Symbolic Power of the Headscarf*

Throughout the years and definitely in these five speeches, Bonafini has had ample authority to speak for the Madres, as president of the Madres Association, and for her deceased children who give her the voice from which she speaks. She uses the authority of her admiration of Che Guevara; her authority is also heard in her declarative statements. She does not speak in a questioning manner; she makes assertive and accusing statements, sometimes using profanity. Her sentences are often repetitive and for effect, she repeats clauses and words, for example, *viva* (long live, as if they are kings). She speaks in a collective voice, a collective consciousness.

Her awareness of Che Guevara came from her children. She establishes her ethos as she compares Guevara's struggle with the struggles of the disappeared. After greeting her audiences, her topic automatically turns to the disappeared. She connects the work of



the disappeared to Madres' revolutionary work. This too is a pattern; the Madres' work is their children's work.

Having established her ethos, Bonafini turns to motherhood and those metaphors that saturate her motherhood discourse. The Madres established their movement on the foundation of motherhood, and established the unity of motherhood and the connection to mothers throughout Latin America and the world. The-most significant symbol of motherhood is the Madres' white scarf with *aparacion con vida* (appear with life) embroidered on the back. Bonafini wears this scarf at all occasions and it gives her immediate and recognizable ethos.

The white scarf is also a symbol of many messages. In the beginning of their organized protests, the mothers began wearing diapers to feel the closeness of their children. As these diapers turned to scarves, the white scarf became the method through which they identified each other; it also became a means in which to establish the symbolic color of white and international peace. These methods of expression speak loudly in terms of the Madres identifying each other and in using an alternative method to allow for their children to be visible during the dictatorship when no one knew their whereabouts. It also gave the Madres territorial rights to the Plaza de Mayo when photos of the white scarf (pañuelos) were painted on the Plaza cement sidewalk. Their territorial rights to the Plaza de Mayo are important because it is where their children "live." Today the scarf is a trademark for the Madres; it has become an international symbol of their motherhood.

Tarrow argues that one of the greatest challenges for social movements is to frame contention with symbols that are both familiar and dynamic; he suggests that

symbols used in social movements must be rooted in the history of the country but at the same time hold a transformational power (107). Such is the case of the diaper, a symbol that carries with it a mother's roots: birth. By claiming and sustaining the right to motherhood, the Madres were able to create their own power by fusing the private with the public sphere of women in order to organize protests—dressed not as militant protestors, but as women or more specifically, mothers. This vision of private lives fused with public display serves to keep not only the memories alive, but to illustrate the power of repetition as well as the power of silence.

The white scarf also has hierarchical implications involving *who* wears one and *why*. In my own interview with Madre Elsa Manzotti in Buenos Aires in 2008, she discussed the importance of the scarf today, saying that they now only give them to people they choose—only those people whom the Madres allow to have one can wear one.

The Madres' white scarf is symbolic of the Madres' surrender to their children. The white headscarf was not a form of surrender to the military. The meanings surrounding the headscarf carry a particular importance. McGee (1980) claims that certain words, or "ideographs," used by a dominant political force can be used to control a society. The headscarf is a visual ideograph, one that has expanded a rhetorical idea and has uncovered the specific ideology of the beliefs, values, and attitudes of the oppressed and the oppressor. Janis Edwards and Carol Winkler believe that visual ideographs can appear to members of the culture in a variety of forms through the addition, omission, and distortion of their component elements (212). If we look at the scarf as one of these components, we might assume that the Madres are victims of their loved ones' deaths and

simultaneously, the mothers are victims of the military dictatorship. In the case of the scarf, the surrender of the Madres is to their children and their children's ideals.

The diaper scarf creates a birth metaphor to keep the Madres in a permanent state of motherhood. Because of the nature of mothers in Latin America and the mother's place in the family and society, this metaphor creates much more than a message of birth. The metaphor links birth to rebirth. Seen as a counter-attack to the generals' term *desaparecidos*, their metaphor sets the permanent foundation for a political philosophy of socialized motherhood—one that is difficult to challenge. The diaper magnifies the philosophy of the Argentine culture and during the military dictatorship; it addressed the familial influence and historical influence behind use of the scarf—to make visual the mothers to make visual the disappeared. Mothers cannot exist without children, and the birth metaphor is an eternal symbol which speaks when the silence was imposed on the Argentine culture.

bell hooks pays particular attention to the visual arts as symbolic forms, claiming that visual symbols are important because they allow oppressed individuals to imagine new possibilities and alternatives (25). According to hooks, "If art moves us, touches our spirit, it is not easily forgotten. Images will reappear in our heads against our will" (25). Images in symbolic forms help rhetoric move from critique and resistance to the creation of new forms and thus new worlds. They also serve the function of healing and making whole what mainstream ideology defines as inferior and inadequate, suggesting that marginalized rhetors are capable, wise, and competent and have the capacity to affect the world in which they live (Foss 92). Visuals and their lasting impression can serve an important function in seeking answers to oppression. The scarves are symbolic of the

Madres' bond to their children and their visual arts are symbolic of a bigger broader statement. Bonafini always wears her white scarf. Its color is an important symbol she is often outspoken and protective of it, as evidenced in her remarks to the Ladies in White in Cuba.

The symbolic power of the headscarf is a way to bring the private sphere of motherhood into the public sphere. Socializing motherhood plays a role in universal motherhood as the Madres expand their role as mothers of all who suffer—connecting to all mothers in the world, according to Bonafini, who see their children die of hunger, bombing, wars and diseases due to poverty. Bonafini claims that the Madres are not just the mothers of their own children, but they are also the mothers of the thirty-thousand missing children of Argentina, the fifteen thousand who were shot, the nine thousand who were imprisoned and the million and a half exiles. The Madres claim motherhood to all victims, all oppressed.

Another major point of motherhood connectivity is the slogan, “I am the other.” This is a perpetual bond; they are me, I am they. It’s a symbolic strategy of being. In this light, Bonafini speaks to mothers in other Latin American countries: Guatemala, Haiti, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile, Uruguay, Bolivia, and Peru, and she supports mothers in Iraq, Peru, Colombia, Chile, and Brazil. The mothers will go where they are called because they want peace. They offer solidarity to all who suffer. Bonafini’s metaphor for motherhood means much more than being a mother. It is a shroud that creates an imaginary blanket of protection for all children and all oppressed. The Madres seek unity so that motherhood will hold a central position in society.

### *Denial of Agency and Prosopopoeia*

As a mother, Bonafini transforms her position when she repeatedly states that her children gave birth to her ideas. By allowing their children's voices to be heard through her own discourse, she allows the children to speak through her. This is symbolic of the *Mater Dolorosa*,<sup>1</sup> the suffering and sacrificing mother, but can also be seen as a Biblical strategy. The Virgin Mary achieved sainthood *through* her universal son and according to Christianity, we are all saved. In a Catholic culture, this strategy would resonate in a powerful way. However, for Bonafini, it is a monumental task to overcome the negative stigma attached to the Madres' children's' revolutionary ideals because morality and sainthood cannot be mixed with fighting; guerilla tactics cannot be mixed with sainthood.

The revolutionaries speaking through their mothers signal the mothers' subordination to the revolutionary vision of their sons and daughters who lead, posthumously, the mothers in the fight. And yet, the self that Bonafini constructs is a sentimental self, one that appears to have had a psychic change and is reborn of an ideology that wasn't initially hers, even though she bore the child. In some ways, the message was always hers.

Bonafini does not speak for or about her children; she does not advocate for them; they speak *through* her. A rhetorical stylistic figure of speech and perhaps one of her greatest strategies is the prosopopoeia, which is the act of speaking in the voice and language of someone absent (Jasinski 297). This type of device is also used for the

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<sup>1</sup> This provocative slogan resembles the ideology of the religious *Mater Dolorosa*, the sorrowful mother, keeper of all suffering. The personal image of mothers in Argentina is common—to be relegated to the position of caretaker. In Latin America, where the Catholic Church strongly influenced social thought, reformers frequently invoked maternalism to support liberal feminist demands for education and equal rights (Freedman 67). In part, the power of motherist groups such as the Madres arises from their ability to draw upon the feminine imagery of Catholicism against the state by evoking the image of the suffering mother and her sacrifice (Radcliffe and Westwood 18).

fictional dead, so it should not be confused with the voices of the Madres' children. According to Jasinski, prosopopoeia goes beyond quoting someone else's words; when it is employed well, an advocate will (if only briefly) become some other person (555). Speaking in the voice of the disappeared is central to Bonafini's rhetoric.

The voices of the dead are also the voices of the tortured, not only the tortured disappeared, but the torture the mothers felt. In *The History of Torture Throughout the Ages*, Scott verifies that torture comes in many forms: "It may exist in addition to physical torture. It may exist where there is no physical torture at all" (3). Ironically, the children were more than likely tortured and the mothers were tortured too; the rhetoric of the mothers suggests that their children's suffering was the mothers' suffering too, and that as mothers, they themselves also suffered their own type of emotional torture.

Karlyn Campbell (2003) proposes that agency is: "communal and participatory, hence, both constituted and constrained by externals that are material and symbolic; is invented by authors who are points of articulation; emerges in artistry or craft; is effected through form; and is perverse, that is, inherently, protean, ambiguous, and open to reversal" (3). She gives an example of agency as understood by ancient Greeks that agency was collective, of the polis, and that beliefs either constituted common sense or were accepted by the community as true. Citizens' contributions were linked to the well-being of the community (4). In this sense, the agency of the Madres becomes an important source of truth for the community. This truth, I believe, is transferred to Bonafini's children as she denies her own agency; her children become their own agents of the truth for the community. In this way, Bonafini keeps her children's philosophies in a state of eternal truth. The Madres deny their own agency in order to give agency to

their disappeared children so that their children's voices can be heard. Moreover, Bonafini subordinates herself to her children, sacrificing her own thoughts and words for the sake of her children.

Through the agency provided by voices of tortured and dead children, Bonafini begins her efforts to effectuate change, as Griffin (1969) suggests, "not through the forces of wealth or arms, but through the force of persuasion" (1). Bonafini's goal is to give credence to the work her children may have been doing—the work of revolution. Bonafini knows this and has found a unique way to keep both the memory of her children and their words alive.

The Madres' struggle was in keeping the memories and their children alive without their bodies—without their children they had no way of continuing to be mothers—no way to mother them or to maintain their identities as mothers. Many say that disappearance is the perfect crime. The crime itself is invisible, except to those who are victims or relatives, and both are meant to suffer silently, individually and alone. The victim is denied martyrdom; those left behind are prohibited the final ritual of bereavement (Schirmer 5). Yet under a shroud of silence, under a veil of tears, and under an unspoken oath of loyalty to her sons, Bonafini began as a non-political actor to oppose the military rule and as a consequence, found a way to keep alive her sons' voices.

The metaphor of the Plaza being a home to the dead is one that presents an image of life. She personifies her deceased children who have become the revolutionary ghosts of the Plaza. She says that the reason the Madres meet on each Thursday is because their children are still there. She says that even when they arrived, the children were telling them that they [Madres] are doing good, "These are direct instructions. She establishes

the voices of the children and creates a vision of them. She feels the children's spirits fluttering around then casts them into the audience, transferring the unity of motherhood to the solidarity of a mothering audience, of caretaking; the audience now becomes surrogate mothers for the disappeared.

Bonafini personifies the dead as her deceased children speak to her. Typical of her speeches, she interrupts herself and speaks to her children, telling them [the Madres] that love is the biggest force. She interjects this sentiment at no particular place in the speech, and speaks directly to her children telling them that they are proud of them. She gives them praise as a mother would, as if they are there.

The Madres give leadership to their children themselves by promoting their children's revolutionary ideas in Argentina's democratic society. Bonafini elevates her children's status so that their deaths were not useless. The voices are keeping the Madres from experiencing their own voices. They are the oppressors that prevent their mothers from moving out of a victim stance of mothers who lost their children.

### *Scapegoating*

Bonafini continually makes her position in the movement clear; the Madres' goal is to demand the impossible—to bring back alive the disappeared and to bring justice to political prisoners. They had presented their demands to the dictatorship, but these demands could not be met, and so the *new* government was also to become the enemy.

In extremist left rhetoric, and other types of rhetoric in most movements, there exists a simplistic dichotomy between right and wrong. It is this ideology that allows for a scapegoat tactic. Along this line, Griffin (1993) claimed that “to study a movement is to



study a striving for salvation, a struggle for perfection, a progress toward the good. It is a progress that is grounded in Guilt; but Guilt needs Redemption, and Redemption needs Redeemer—which is to say, a Victim, a scapegoat, a kill” (205).

How and why does Bonafini create the scapegoat and what is the process that led to her inclusion of scapegoating in her discourse? Perhaps it began with her grief. In noting the grief of the Madres, Thornton points out the isolation of the families of the disappeared:

...because of the government’s policy of terror and guilt by association, if a family member disappeared, one did not receive consolation from friends and neighbors; conversely, one was avoided by former friends and associates and even sometimes by extended family members. The grieving family was alone, deserted by and cut off from former support systems, unable to share its loss. (285)

There is almost never a body or any hard evidence of death, but on the other hand, neither was there evidence of life, and for years families were stuck in a nightmarish limbo. Two Argentine researchers, Kijak and Pelento, studied the effects on the families of the disappeared of not being able to go through the normal grieving process. They claim that because there was no body to see or tend to, no date or circumstance of death known, no burial site to visit, and no support from society for this grief, they found that those whose family members had disappeared were “mourners-in-waiting,” torn by the violent conflicting emotions of needing to accept probable death, but hoping that the loved one would return (Thornton 285). Using a psychoanalytic approach they concluded that such a conflict caused intense guilt, “greatly magnifying the feeling that by giving the person up for dead, the mourner was somehow killing him [or her]” (qtd. in Anderson 17.) Because of their denial, according to psychologists, the mothers were not able to complete the essential task of mourning or to accept the reality of the loss through death.

Looking at a historical view of mothers in mourning and other cases helps to explain the importance of mourning in societies. The first amnesty occurred in Athens in 403 BCE. Nicole Loraux discusses the specific case of this amnesty and its requirement that citizens remember to forget the previous horrors, for the sake of social stability. For the same reason, the mourning of mothers in the Greek city-states was controlled in quality, quantity, and location (19). Loraux explains that when mourning is encouraged and clothed in vengeance, dangerous hatreds can be sustained for centuries (19). Suzanne Evans emphasizes that the main concern in the limiting of mourning, which essentially means the limiting of the role of women, is to endure the stability of the city. If a mourning mother turns her passion into anger against the state, she may become volatile and dangerous (142).

Whether or not the military knew of the saga and history of the mourning mother is not the question here, but rather the question of power that mourning mothers possess if their emotions are not controlled. The military called the *Madres las locas*, or madwomen, and they harassed, arrested, and killed many of the *Madres* and their supporters, yet the *Madres'* emotions were not controlled, but amplified as their search for justice continued. Did their own guilt as mothers play a role in their actions or was it their inability to protect their children or to mourn properly that caused their movement to develop? Was it a mother's obligation or a moral obligation or both, fused together?

The moral striving for the good in this case was caused, even before the state terrorism, by the mis-communication of the classes, when Argentine citizens turned from acceptance to rejection of the hierarchy and hence the prevailing authority, as Griffin explains (460). Griffin also explains that as loyalty spreads and the bonds of love corrode,

the sense of guilt grows increasingly greater (460). Keeping with Griffin's analysis, when the Madres were divided from their existing order, they stood alone as mothers, asking for direction, demanding answers, always with hope.

Bonafini's dream is salvation and she shares this message—that she wants a revolution, a utopia. According to Griffin, the “Total transformation of their condition, a state of Redemption; will envision, consciously or unconsciously” and they will want an “ideal Order—heaven, paradise, the ‘good society, Utopia’” (460). And so, this Utopian society or the good society is a part of what happens when authority is challenged and the challenger alienated, as in the case of the Madres.

Bonafini hones her communication through redemptive identification which occurs through the process of shared guilt. The guilt is then projected onto the scapegoat.

To summarize:

This sin [guilt] is externalized by projecting it on an alien force which acts as a scapegoat. The scapegoat serves as a receptacle, a symbolic vessel, for the “iniquities of those who would be cured by attacking it. Expressed in another way, the persecutors attribute to a sacrificial victim all the sins which plague them internally and then are purged of sin by the actual or symbolic destruction of the victim. (Burke 406)

The military could have been Bonafini's scapegoat and in the beginning was the scapegoat. However, her crusade to bring all of those responsible would include not only the military junta, but the priests, the government officials, and the involvement of other countries that refused to help or even assisted in the disappearances. By 1985, the Madres' had enlarged their goals to include justice and political demands for restitution. They wanted and needed restitution to continue their children's cause and to purge themselves of the guilt of being helpless in their children's' defense. Because she is born of her children, Bonafini's rebirth exists solely for the benefit to continue the activist

work of her children, keeping them in a perpetual state of victimage, and in a direct opposition to socialism, capitalism and anti-imperialism, the necessary scapegoats.

Bonafini blames capitalism and the International Monetary Fund for many woes of the poor and of economic repressions. There is evil in the world and this evil is called perversion. She establishes the fact that there is evil in the world and that it cries for the necessity of unity. Unity is dictated, in part, by the Madres' children, who told them that the only solution is to stand together.

In the present there is the perversion that is globalization and capitalism. She blames capitalism for the new drop-outs of the system—people who have no work and who cannot feed their children. Capitalism too is Bonafini's scapegoat.

She also blames the United States. Her dislike of capitalism seems the antithesis of socialism. The U.S. is evil; socialism is good. In a strong argument, she states that the Madres repudiate and are revolted by the [International] Monetary Fund, and by what she calls the most terrorist country in the world: the United States. She re-affirms that the U.S. is the most terrorist country and adds that it is the one that invades most countries, blocks most countries, and kills the most people. She does not believe that the U.S. is a democratic country; she believes it is the most terrorist country. This is her scapegoat and is also just one of the many enemies of whom she speaks.

### *Themes, Imagery, and Appeals*

There are common themes in these five speeches that are noteworthy although not as prominent as the aforementioned. One is the theme of young people, especially those who “fight like Che, raised the flags like Che.” She puts a strong emphasis on Latin

American youth and their part in the revolution. Bonafini's words are influenced by Guevara's revolutionary words and revolution and liberation is the goal. Words like liberty, love, hope, and revolution are prominent in her discourse; liberation of all victims of injustice in Latin America is a common theme. Guevara taught idealistic and oftentimes frustrated youth not to wait for a revolutionary consciousness to develop and argued that small groups of revolutionaries could speed that development by initiating an armed struggle; he also taught that popular forces could defeat a professional army (Guevara 1973). In her arguments for youth, she gives power to the young people (young people are the judges to convict the murderers), calling them the judges who will condemn. It is youth who will sit in judgment of those responsible for deaths; it is the youth who will continue the work of their own children.

Another theme is the demand for justice; demands for those responsible for their children's deaths to be punished. According to Bonafini, there is no pardon, there is no forgiveness, and there is no end point. Justice will never be served. Hers is a life sentence because tragedy has no real solution and her children have not been returned. This theme of keeping the children alive assumes that they are still alive but will die. She requests that the audience keep their children alive and that the mothers do it by giving their children life; their children are inspiring the mothers and they stand beside the mothers.

Creating graphic imagery is another type of rhetoric device that Bonafini employs and her emotional appeals are many as she creates graphic images of her children dying. She connects this thought to the image of Guevara, calling the image serene like those who fight. She weaves Guevara's assassination with the thousands of Argentine deaths,

describing the connection she makes of the image of Guevara's death to the image of the bodies of the dead. She also creates a peaceful vision of liberation.

As she describes the disappeared children, alive and drugged, as their feet are put in soft cement then thrown into the river after the cement hardens created a terrible image. In like manner, describing how corpses will reappear on the beaches creates an immense cognitive dissonance in the audience, one in which there is no solution. She also describes how the children must have felt as they were thrown alive into the sea or burned and buried along the highways. Bonafini does not have to exaggerate; she speaks in facts by creating the imagery. We can almost see young children playing in the grass while the bodies lie below. But then she personifies the bodies as living, claiming that the ideas of the "bodies" are the same ones that "flourish in every youth who struggle."

Perhaps one of the strongest of emotional appeals is when Bonafini tells the audience that the mothers have fought their entire lives and that they never thought their children could be dead; never imagined them dead. She admits and confides in her audience that it is not easy to accept the death of your own flesh and your own children who were tortured.

Time is also a significant factor; Bonafini consistently uses the element of time in her speeches. She condemns the past and she has hope for the future. She also uses time to establish the number of years that the Madres have been organized. She uses time to preserve memories and history. She often brings the memories of the state terrorism and her children early into the speech to establish the Madres' authority; they are guided by their children who direct the Madres to take action. She establishes the past to keep the memory of the coup alive.

Bonafini's on-site location of the speeches adds to her persuasion. At the Casa Suiza is the Tribute to Che; in front of the ESMA; in Paris at the UNESCO ceremony, at one of the Madres' many resistance marches, and in at Moncada Barracks in Cuba. The geographical implication adds to her message as she delivers her speeches to live audiences. Her discourse is explosive and revolutionary, but her arguments as a grieving mother to revolutionary radical complicate her message. She generally gives the time frame of the number of years since the coup.

Bonafini's words remind the audience that the mothers will never see their children again and although their children will not return to them physically, they believe that their children live again each time humans stand up and protest and that ever time people show that their children existed. This is an argument supported by the Madres' university where they want to educate young people to go into politics and accept commitment. Bonafini explains that it is the people who are corrupt, so Bonafini logically explains that she wants to raise a generation of young people who will look at politics in a positive manner, as "the best form of human action and as something that will free us and lead us to a better world." Bonafini wants a new society—one of revolution run by decent revolutionaries.

She often sets up persuasive arguments with symbolism. For example, she claims that "It is not enough to sing the march, not enough to lift a fist, not enough to bring red flags, not enough to bring the banners of the Che, not enough to put on the shirt." Although these symbols create a vision in our minds of solidarity, she says she wants more. Another strong argument is the fear that the dictatorship might return and they need strength to retaliate. Also, she often personifies objects, for example, she personified

the ESMA building in “I Call for Punishment.” She calls Argentina the homeland, calls the general murderers and assassins. She often uses strong profanity: “murders of a thousand whores and the concept of hate: hate from the bottom of our hearts, and we hate equal to the force of love. Bonafini uses the repetition of phrases (anaphora) in two of the five speeches, which also shows her anger, and chanting too is common at the Madres’ marches. Her use of profanity demonstrates her anger, for example, in this phrase: the sons of bitches do not speak anymore, don’t leave anymore, or they don’t occupy the Government House in reference to the military generals.

The elements of her speeches are many, as illustrated above, and these discussed are certainly not exhaustive of the thirty-four years’ worth of speeches she’s given. This discussion does, however, point to a variety of rhetorical tools that have aided in this movement’s longevity, their institutionalization, and their worldwide popularity.

#### *Additional Assumption*

In this analysis I emphasize three significant strategies that Bonafini uses repeatedly in her discourse: the motherhood metaphor and the symbol of the headscarf, denial of agency and the use of prosopopoeia, and scapegoating. These strategies, when brought together, can represent what I call a rhetoric of restitution. Restitution is typically defined as the act of compensating for loss; therefore, a rhetoric of restitution is the discourse and symbols that are directed towards compensation. Bonafini’s significant elements of resistance, when joined together, form the basis of arguments that demand compensation for their loss.



There exists a potential connection between the elements of the birth metaphor, denial of agency, and scapegoating; scapegoating is connected to the denial of agency, and is also connected to death and rebirth, or a reborn society—a restitution reborn of a society—a rebirth, renewing, a returning. Revenge, restitution, and justice are three elements that continually weave through this discourse, intertwining life with death, past with present, hate with love.

Bonafini uses birth metaphors that place her in a perpetual state of motherhood. She claims that her own “rebirth” was a birth into socialist revolution, thereby validating her children’s activism. She denies her own agency in order to give agency to her disappeared children so that her children’s voices can be heard. Furthermore, her reliance on scapegoating positions Bonafini, the Madres, and their disappeared children in a permanent state of victimage.

Bonafini speaks of the United States as an “accursed” government. She sees the United States as a threat (“we are not afraid of them”) and connects what she is doing with what her children did. Not only are the children victims, but the Madres too are victims. Hence, Bonafini’s rhetoric is often combative and the Madres’ are in a continuing psychological war. Dora de Bazze explains:

It was like that, a psychological war...I remember the first day we carried a banner with the letters *Donde estan los detenidos—desaparecidos?* Where are the detained-disappeared people? It was a tremendous thing. Thirty or forty mothers shouting: *Donde estan nuestros hijos?* And the *milicos* all lined up in front of us with machine guns and behind them the tear gas trucks.” (Fisher, *Mothers* 62)

This psychological war is best illustrated by the Madres’ refusal to surrender. There is an ongoing plea for a psychological restitution. Unlike other types of rhetorical genres, Bonafini uses the voices of the Madres’ disappeared children, denying the

Madres' own agency and claims that their own voices have become their children's. These voices can be thought of as prophetic, however, Bonafini's combination of forensic, deliberative, and epideictic rhetoric, and her aggressive confrontational form is a combination of personal motherhood rhetoric and political activist rhetoric.

The words that could not be spoken at the time of the dictatorship by the desaparecidos created a dimension of silence that was created by perceptions of reality that were not allowed to be described out loud. These words were the altered sounds of the words that were formed from fear and terror—the words spoken in a dimension not found in the private or the public spheres, but found in the disappeareds' voices. This alternate dimension is where Bonafini finds the words of her children; she then gives them agency. Bonafini's denied agency gives voice to the silenced—the words that at different times and places, take various shapes and forms in words or symbols.

The rhetoric of restitution is one way to identify Bonafini's recurring rhetorical patterns. This type of restitution can be thought of as a method of repayment for loss, not monetary loss, but psychological and emotional loss. The rhetoric of restitution provides the field of social movement rhetoric with an explanation for two phenomena: one, the goal for restitution becomes apparent as a social movement progresses into a political movement; and two, the changing of a political climate of a government does not mean the termination of a social movement. These two factors alter social movement theory considerably.

Bonafini wants to change the system and her discourse reflects this challenge. She describes the impact the Madres have had in changing the social order:

To me the Mothers are the women who have broken with many aspects of this system we live in. First, because we went to the streets to confront the dictatorship, because we were capable of doing things that men couldn't do. We've broken the system because we aren't a political party and yet we still have political influence. We are always invited to speak at conference, to open meetings. We are supported by a lot of people in the world. We have lots of groups of young people who come here to help us with our campaigns. (Fisher, *Mothers* 135)

Her words signal not just the importance of mothers and women, but the importance of mothers and women in changing the system when men couldn't.

## CHAPTER 10

### CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes the fact that Argentina's move from dictatorship to democracy did not terminate the Madres' movement, although one might argue that in certain ways the initial movement ended with the end of violence. Analysis of five of Bonafini's significant speeches from 1988 to 2003 magnify major rhetorical elements that include the motherhood metaphors and the symbolic power of the headscarf, denial of agency and the use of prosopopoeia, and scapegoating. The study identifies rhetorical strategies of a social movement that resisted democracy for twenty-nine years. We can certainly call this movement a mothers' movement, but it seems more than just a movement for institutional reform. The combination of the two types of movements creates a new type of movement, one that wants more than change. It is a movement that banks on the past for the success of the future; its institutionalization ensures the goals for the future by using the mistakes of the past. Hebe de Bonafini and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo are steadfast in their continued work. Theirs is the voice of restitution; theirs are the tears of loss.

#### *Impact of the Madres' Movement*

The impact of the Madres' movement has monumental significance when analyzed within the context of state terrorism. The political history of Argentina helps us to understand the platform from which these mothers arose. In a personal interview with former British diplomat Dudley Ankerson who lived in Buenos Aires during the dictatorship, Dudley says that the military mounted a coup at a time of a multi-faceted

war with different factions fighting for power. Some of the factions such as the Triple A were like the early gangsters in New York, others, such as the Montoneros and ERP were more ideologically driven but equally violent. Ankerson explains that the stated intention of the profoundly anti-communist military was to impose law and order but they also intended to suppress those elements in the population which they believed were “anti-Argentine” and “a cancer within the body of the nation” (Ankerson).

Ankerson believes that around 1980-81 the mothers became more politically active, mainly because they weren't getting anywhere in discovering the whereabouts of their loved ones and also because they perceived the military government was increasingly on the defensive. Most mothers just wanted to know where family members were but some had a more political agenda, which varied amongst them. At the same time the military secretly infiltrated the Madres' organization. Ankerson claims that the Madres were very high profile and that over time some of them had become more than just grieving mothers or grandmothers.

The Madres' grief and work to find their children transformed them into the most well-known and renowned mothers' movement in Latin America. They are a source of inspiration for the other women's movements in South America.<sup>1</sup> The Madres and especially Bonafini publicly exposed what the military tried to keep silent. They helped to bring down the military dictatorship and to bring those responsible for the deaths to trial. They did this with their protests, their verbal and nonverbal symbols and writing, and their words. Their strategic rhetoric (and sometimes coercive rhetoric), in other words, was their weapon in a one-sided war.

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<sup>1</sup> In Argentina, the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo have accomplished much in finding babies of mothers who gave birth in prison before they were killed. H.I.J.O.S. (acronym in Spanish; in English it means Children for Identity and Justice Against Forgetting and Silence).

The Madres have evolved from seeing their only purpose of finding their missing children to exposing the abuses of a repressive regime, working for human rights, including political prisoners; and in helping women and children in poverty, in their region and worldwide. Many of their children were abducted because they worked on behalf of the poor, a group the military felt was a breeding ground for new subversives (Thornton 287). Now the Madres feel they are keeping their children's dreams alive by continuing the young people's mission among the poor and by constantly reminding the citizens of the danger of an unchecked military (Thornton 287).

Bonafini and the Madres are famous to many and are a tourist attraction in Buenos Aires. At the Plaza de Mayo on Thursday afternoons, they are selling t-shirts, books, posters, videos, buttons, banners, photos, postcards, and other souvenirs. They wear their white headscarves and are photographed by tourists, put on film by news reporters, and are hounded by researchers like myself. Bonafini uses her children's voices to secure a position in the current Kirchner administration which the Madres' support.

The Madre also have a Web site that has radio, television shows, and videos. When President Obama was elected, there was a letter to Obama on the Madres' site, requesting that the Cuban boycott be lifted. Technology and the Internet have given social movements the opportunity for global awareness and persuasion and connects the Madres worldwide.

They once broke a shroud of silence during a reign of strict military terror over an entire country. They created a visible presence: by their silent marches around the pyramid, by their symbolic scarves, and by the haunting photos of their disappeared they wore around their necks. At the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, a series of scarves are

engraved on the pavement to mark a territory that has become unofficially theirs. The “pañuelos” are one of the many visual traces that the mothers have left in the city of Buenos Aires. They created a bond with each other, as frantic and grieving mothers then fused their selfhood with their children’s and with the problems of the world. They transformed from grieving mothers into a vessel for society’s problems, echoing the revolutionary voices of their deceased children.

Bonafini’s rhetorical instruments of power become more clear as her speeches are analyzed. The three major elements I’ve identified in this study are: the birth metaphor and the symbolic power of the headscarf; the denial of agency and the use of prosopopoeia, and scapegoating. These elements and other rhetorical devices, assist in the rhetorical scholar’s insight into the speech in the given context.

Bonafini is an outspoken role model and she and the Madres’ are a source of inspiration for other women’s movements in the region and around the world. They also helped to bring those responsible to trial, helping to overthrow Amnesty laws that would pardon the generals. In a 2008 personal interview with Madre, Elsa Manzotti, she said that the Madres work towards freeing political prisoners, they work towards eliminating poverty and helping children, and they also wish to connect with the struggles of women worldwide. Most of the Madres seem somewhat timid, many are grandmother-age now, yet Bonafini’s discourse is blatantly aggressive, powerful, and although she wears the scarf as a religious shroud, like the other Madres, she is projecting a unique breed of mothers’ voices—ones in which rely on the voices of others.

In the interview, Manzotti said the Madres’ cause today is now and has always been asking for justice for killers to be in prison. She said that some of the killers

[military generals responsible for the killing], are under house arrest because they are over seventy years old now. The Madres want them all to go to jail instead of being at home. She said that “the Madres will not sit at a political table with the assassins of our sons. It doesn’t matter if they are 70 or 80; they should be in jail (Manzotti).

She added that the Madres have expanded their cause to “be what their children wanted” (Manzotti). They have also expanded their fight to the construction of an area of Buenos Aires to help with new homes from the burning of the Montoneros’ homes. They have a new project—helping a preschool in Buenos Aires called the *Jardin de Abrazos* (Garden of Hugs).

The Madres “socialize motherhood” (Manzotti). She said that their children who were kidnapped and the work they couldn’t do, the Madres are doing now. They work with solidarity groups in Italy and Spain and all over Argentina. They also still march on Thursdays at 3:30 pm at the Plaza de Mayo. She said that the Madres have been invited to the United States, but that they don’t go because they are in disagreement with the U.S. government. She was quick to mention that the U.S. people had nothing to do with their decision.

In the Madres’ struggle for social justice, Bonafini identifies and works with Hugo Chavez, President of Venezuela, against imperialism. In a March 2007 speech Chavez called himself the “Son” of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Ines Vázquez, Academic secretary of the Popular University of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, predicted the future of the Madres by saying: The Mothers ...come before the storm and move amidst the storm: in the coming years, they will say “*Enough!*” with unemployment, poverty, hunger; they will demand freedom for political prisoners, they



will denounce that unemployment is a crime and by the turn of the century, they will welcome the new year at the square, holding fast to a banner representing their collective experience: “*Living and fighting injustice*”(Fisher, *Mothers* 135)

In 2006 the Madres ended their fight with the Argentine government, saying that they no longer have an enemy in the Casa Rosada (government pink house). Bonafini’s speeches continue as the Madres give praise and support to the current Kirchner administration and in June 2008, when President Christina Fernandez Kirchner gave a speech to the Congress, in the audience were Estela Carlotto, founder and president of Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, (Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo),<sup>2</sup> and Bonafini, wearing her white scarf.

The Madres have also had an impact on the feminist movement in the region, there are several points to be made. Aside from the obvious renown of the group in human rights circles and their influence on similar movements, for example in El Salvador and Guatemala, they have also entered into a cooperation with several other women’s association on a transnational level (Taylor 192). Diana Taylor also affirms that the Madres’ cause and approach has had a positive impact on the fight for those women’s issues linked to human rights, such as domestic violence (201). The Madres created a rise in political awareness and participation from women, which is a positive occurrence, one that may have indirectly contributed to the election of Argentina’s first elected woman president, Christina Fernández de Kirchner.

The Madres promote values in Argentina, according to Bonafini who says that they are political, “but our policies are moral, ethical, and with love (Fisher, *Out* 136). To

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<sup>2</sup> Carlotto and the Abuelas were nominated for the Nobel Prize in March 2008.

the Madres, the promotion of motherhood in a political world is important. They have transformed themselves from women seeking to protect the sanctity of the mother-child bond within the existing political system to women wishing to transform the state so that it reflects maternal values (Bouvard 118).

Bonafini's presence is seen in many political and national organizations. For example, the "30<sup>th</sup> Mercosur (Common Market of the South) Summit was held in Cordoba, Argentina, in July 2006. Member countries are Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, and Venezuela. Also attending were Fidel Castro, Bolivian President Evo Morales, and Chilean President Michele Bachelet. Bonafini, along with Castro and Chavez,<sup>3</sup> gave a speech at the closing of the official summit. By speaking out on human rights violations, in a political and economic frame, the Madres have increased awareness of the need for laws to protect people from violence.<sup>4</sup>

Some people refuse to admit that the state terrorism ever occurred. They want to bury that part of Argentina's history. Susana Muñoz, director of La Casa por la Memoria in Mendoza, Argentina, describes the seven years of silence in Argentina as history that was once erased; textbooks once eliminated those seven years from 1976 to 1983. The social and political force of the Madres is calculated differently by many. Some are quick to point out that the mothers are crazy, words mimicked by the military generals. Others tell stories of their family members being kidnapped, of living in terror in silence.

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<sup>3</sup> "The day will come, and it is not very far away, that from the Caribbean, to here in the Rio Plata, we will have a solid political body. A League of Republics. Simon Bolivar called it the mother of nations, the mother of Republics. The Union of all of us in one great political, social and economic force." Hugo Chávez, President of Venezuela and leader of the Bolivarian Revolution. Quote from Chávez speech at the 30<sup>th</sup> Mercosur (Common Market of the South) Summit held in Cordoba, Argentina, July 2006.

<sup>4</sup> This is ironic and contradictory given their connection to FARC, the leftist guerrilla group that, for the last forty years, has tried to stage an overthrow of the government in Colombia, financed by drug trafficking, tortures and kidnapping.

Perhaps the silence imposed was the greatest institutional, political and social force of all—one that the Madres broke by their maternal power.

The Madres have changed the Argentine society's values and terminology. Bonafini's rhetoric has projected the necessity of truth and justice in a society that was inundated with silence and lies. Her rhetoric illustrates that democracy is not always the solution if the government is still corrupt. The values within the society are perhaps most seen in the value of collective memory. The Madres are a constant reminder of the state terrorism, silence, and torture. They have contributed a great deal in furthering the political participation of women and in promoting human rights, and thereby women's rights which are frequently tied with together.

On September 25, 2003, Néstor Kirchner gave a speech to the United Nations. He stated that human rights have a central place in the new agenda of Argentina. The reason he returned to the issue of human rights twenty years after the end of the dictatorship and in the middle of an unprecedented economic crisis was, in his words, "Because we are children of the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo" (Bonner 1).

Latin American countries are heaving with the history of protests for social and political rights. Bonafini voices the anti-imperialism that reign Latin American leftists who support the Marxist movement, now peppered with the socialist concepts of providing food and liberty for all, and for fighting the U. S., the major distributor of neoliberal thought and capitalism. The rhetorical significance of Bonafini's discourse of resistance and her rhetoric of restitution is exposed in the understanding that all voices have relevancy, and in this case, that mothers' voices have an underdetermined amount of power.

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## APPENDIX A<sup>1</sup>

“Homenaje al Che in la Casa Suiza”

“Tribute to Che in the Swiss House”

Buenos Aires Province

October 8, 1988

Companions:

I have accepted this invitation with worry because I did know Ernesto Che Guevara until my children made me see (the struggle); because I did not know of his fight until his death; because from my kitchen it was very difficult to understand some things.

But understand that besides the fight, besides the destruction, the desperation, the horror, of the torture and the death that surrounds us, we learned to see that thousands of young people in Argentina had fought like him, had raised their flags and had had the same returns.

There are no great things that have not already been said, and surely people with more authority than I, from Che. What I could say is that although I did not see my children dead, we asked for an “Appearance with Life” the question to a system, we all know the majority of them were shot. And often I imagine how their last moments were, assassinated.

And then Che’s image appears, that image which we all saw in the newspapers, that image that we all saw in the television. Serene like all those who fight for something so just. And hopefully the image of that death, of Che’s assassination that was so terrible and the thousands and thousands of deaths that has been like that, serene like all these that fight for something so just and so beautiful like the liberations of the towns.

I do not come to say anything new. The torture, the death and the execution did not break the thoughts they planted. Their bodies have died, but their ideas, their hopes, their utopia, their love for the towns will be reborn in each one of the young people who raise their fists to promise that they are not going to abandon this battle.

They have left alone many of who today tear their cloths speaking of Che, like they left alone our missing children. Many of those who today raise the flag saying that they were

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<sup>1</sup> All speeches with the exception of the UNESCO speech are in Spanish on the Madres’ web site: <http://www.madres.org/asociacion/documentos/discursos/discursos.asp>. They were translated by myself under the direction and assistance of professors Victoria Magariños and Belén Guana from CELE (*Centro de Español como Lengua Extranjera*), a language institute at the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo in Mendoza, Argentina. The UNESCO speech is in English and was published online by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).



there, that they knew them, that they accompanied them when our children went to the streets to do exactly the same, said they were terrorist.

To be revolutionary is a beautiful thing. That to do politics well, with dignity and morality, is a beautiful thing. That wanting our liberation is a beautiful thing.

I am asking all to raise the figure of Che, remembering him, trying to imitate him, trying to understand him, that you do not forget those companions who still populate the Argentine jails. We do not have to ask ourselves anything, capitalism does what it always did. And if the right advances, it is because we left them the place. We do not. Let's not ask ourselves why the right advances. We have to be rock and stone and stand up, each one of us being our own soldier not letting the right advance, so that later we don't have to cry, making self-critical. The best self-criticism is to do it before each act. They will not move us; they will not move us.

Let's change the language. The best language is of always, but it is also the one that is lived. Liberation without revolution is not possible, as it is also not possible without solidarity, without participation, without the growth of base social organizations which are the ones that the police and army are appointing, and those are the ones they want to destroy. For that reason we must be solidifying those bases very well.

To all the social organizations, we need to help them, to accompany them, to maintain them. And we need to fight from within and outside the parties so that they conserve their dignity. The best candidacy is the one that is done together with the village, by the village, for the village. And to fight for a village government, when we are all inclined to give and not receive.

The Mothers are very captivated with the fight. We are only inclined to give. We are not going to ask for anything. We do not want political space. We do not want power. We want the triumph of the revolution someday, sometime, so that those children of ours that had many dreams of the best, would sometime see specifically this beautiful idea that Che and others wanted to progress. And because of the indifference of some, the complicity of others and the terrorism of the state (that I not only implant here, but in all of Latin America) we are as we are.

While there are Mothers in Latin America, Guatemala, in Haiti, in El Salvador, in Nicaragua, in Chile, in Uruguay, in Bolivia, in Peru, while there are Mothers able to go on the streets to (shout) from this car so hard and so difficult, there will be young people, lots that will surely follow us. We are not going to see the revolution in which Che dreamed of, but we are sure that we are on the path. On the beautiful path of liberation!

Che always accompanies us in our marches. His ideals are ours. Che was the biggest accomplishment Latin America gave and he will continue being the light that illuminates all the revolutions.

## APPENDIX B

“Pide Castigo!”

“I Call for Punishment!”

Speech in front of the ESMA, Buenos Aires

Hebe de Bonafini

March 1, 1995

Fellows, friends, dear mothers:

It's been 19 years since the beginning of horror. 19 years, and some applauded that day, others wept, others were indifferent. But none of us, 19 years ago, dreamed that Mothers would be here today, in front of this deadly building, this building used to be called “school,” in front of this place that should remain as a memorial of horror, as a monument to death, as the largest monument to the greatest murderers who stepped on our homeland.

I want to say, comrades, that what Scilingo says is not new to us; we said from the beginning. Unfortunately, we knew about “pentonaval,” unfortunately we knew what was happening: they threw our live children into the bottom of the sea near Punta Indio naval air station, from the base's aircraft, putting our children's feet in soft cement and when the cement dried they pushed them into the sea.

But of course, the corpses would reappear. Today, so many years later, they come back again and again and again! And those corpses that appeared this time on the beaches of Santa Teresita are the sign that our children are back. They come back every time somebody shouts, every time somebody protests / demonstrates, they are back in each of you!

They sowed terror and could do nothing [to stop them]! They pushed them alive into the sea and could do nothing! They burned them on heaps of tires and could do nothing! They buried them by the roadsides and could do nothing!

We, their mothers, who have been demonstrating in the streets for almost 18 years, never thought that today in this sinister place we were going to say: Murderers, sons of a thousand whores: we hate you!

We hate you from the bottom of our hearts! We hate you, and hate you with as much force as we love our children!

How can we fail to hate Scilingo and Vergez ... We will never sit at their table, because that is the table of the bastards, of the murderers! And it makes us terribly angry that organizations such as the Grandmothers and CELS should claim that they would sit next to them, next to the ones who killed more than 30,000 people.

We, the Mothers, we will never accept that the damage which needs to be repaired with justice be repaired with money! We will never promote economic repair because capitalism fixes it all with money!

Neither money, nor the dead, neither the Scilingos, nor the Vergez [will repair the damage]! The disappearance of persons is a continuing offense, because it is a crime against humanity, that's why we stood before doctor Barcesat of the League for the Rights of Man and before our lawyers to seek trial of Scilingo and now Vergez. We also denounced the sale of weapons that have to do the deals they made with these men who are here. They are traffickers in weapons and drugs. That is what this School is!

So today, we are surrounded by so many young people and so many journalists who represent Rodolfo Walsh today, whom we shall never forget, and hundreds of journalists who disappeared as they risked their lives to do what needed to be done, and our beautiful children who succumbed to the hand of these murderers.

Dear children! Today here, the greatest respect, the greatest love, the greatest strength, for you!

They will continue trafficking arms, selling their children, whom will one day repudiate and condemn them. Their children will never be proud of them, while we try every day to be worthy of the children we bore.

We feel more and more proud every day of you, dear children! We know that inside here, on this ground here in what is called a "school," where many young people come to do sports, below the grass, are your bodies.

But who cares about the bodies today, when what is important is that their ideas flourish in every youth who struggles, in everyone who demonstrates, in everyone who makes a demand, in everyone who dreams, in every young person who has a dream!

You bloom like a flower every day in every child who is born and in every mother who hopes they are born in freedom!

Today here in this place, we announce to you all that on May 4th, in the Plaza de Mayo, we are going to do an all-day trial to convict the murderers, and you, young people, will be appointed judges of that court. It will be young people who will act as judges to convict the murderers. Young people are going to be the judges who will condemn and there will be lawyers, and there will be arguments and defenses will be indefensible.

But you will be the best judges, who can condemn better, because you are the brightest, because you do not want anything for you, because like our children, you taught us about solidarity.

May 4th at the Plaza de Mayo, a remembrance day of the 18 years of Mothers. On April 30 it will have been 18 years since we started this fight. On May 4 at the Plaza, we will all be sheltered by a huge scarf that a group of architects are building.

We will be there, to show the world that there is no pardon, that there is no forgiveness, no unquestioning obedience,<sup>2</sup> that there is no end point, no matter how many times they order the killing of our children! No matter how many exhumations they do, no matter how many things they want to impose on us...

We will be there, together with all those who want to participate, with the lawyers who want to help us; we will publicly impose a political sentence so that our people may start walking a path of freedom, a path of justice, and not follow the path proposed in the plan by Menem and Cavallo, which is none other than continue to kill and kill with or without the School of Mechanics.

And finally, I would like to read out again what I read many years ago and which has great significance today.

“For the sake of our children, our children,  
I demand punishment!”

“For those who punctuated the homeland with blood, I demand punishment!”

“For the executioner who commanded this death, I demand punishment!”

“For the traitor who was promoted in retribution for a crime  
I demand punishment!”

“For those who gave the order to agony  
I demand punishment!”

“For those who defended the crime  
I demand punishment.”

“I do not want to shake their hands, soaked in blood:  
I demand punishment!”

I do not want them to be appointed ambassadors, nor I want them to be at peace, at home! I want to see them here, tried, in this place, fellows ...!

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<sup>2</sup> According to Magariños and Gauna, she is referring to “obediencia debida” (literally, “due obedience”). Some of the accused in the trials for offences against humanity claimed that they had imprisoned, tortured, and murdered the missing because they were forced to obey their superiors’ orders. Since then “obediencia debida” was claimed in extenuation.

## APPENDIX C

Acceptance Speech, UNESCO Prize for Peace Education<sup>3</sup>  
UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, France  
Hebe de Bonafini  
Dec. 14, 1999

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Friends,  
Comrades,

By your applause you have assured us that the path we have chosen is the right one. The Director-General has told you, as some of you knew already, that for the past 22 years, every single Thursday, as if it were the only Thursday, we march round the Plaza de Mayo. This is the only way in which we can restore contact with our children, the only way which enables us to feel that they are still alive. From the start we Mothers were engaged in peace education, without knowing it; we marched round a public square in order to confront the dictatorship; we made an immense effort not to stay at home and weep. Every morning we asked ourselves: What are we going to do today? Every morning, without our children when we woke up, we lost hope of ever seeing them again. When we finally realized that they would never come back we decided not to leave the square, we decided to carry on the fight until our dying day. And we also decided that it was pointless for single individuals to try to fight alone, and that we must take responsibility for placing motherhood in the centre of society by becoming mothers to all.

We travel all over the world, we feel and show solidarity with all mothers throughout the world who are suffering, all mothers throughout the world who see their children die of hunger, bombing, wars and diseases due to poverty, because the world is a world of perversion. We have come to learn in the streets what our children always told us: "Mother, the only solution is to stand together". We have to stand together in society, we have to share among ourselves. It is not easy to socialize motherhood, but we have done so in order to become everybody's mother - not only the mothers of our own children, but also those of the 30,000 missing children of Argentina, 23 the 15,000 who were shot, the 9,000 who were imprisoned and the million and a half exiles.

We have sought to represent the mothers of thousands and thousands of children in other countries who have also been imprisoned. And today, with this perversion that is globalization and capitalism, the people who are now missing from the system are the people who have no work, who cannot feed their children; they are men and women who

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<sup>3</sup> Published in English in 2000 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

no longer have a place in society, who are no longer taken into account, either for housing or food or education or health. They are the new drop-outs from the system. Well, we also fight for them, we devote our lives also to their cause. Many people have sought to buy us out; we have even received hundreds of offers. Yet we are not going to establish a new political party, we do not want anything for ourselves; we shall never see our children again, they will never return to us physically, but it is as though they live again every time human beings stand up and protest, every time they show that they exist. Our children still live, we give them life in every one of our acts. Here this evening I am sure that they are inspiring us, that they stand beside us. Revolutionaries never die because their actions represent something so fine, so united and so unthinkable that they cannot die. As long as there is a single person left to raise their voice, our children will live.

People try to buy us out with financial compensation. Ours is the only organization in the country which has turned these offers down because education must go hand in hand with ethics. We have to say to young people today: "Your life cannot be bought, our children's life cannot be expressed in terms of money, it is worth a life. We shall never sell our children's blood; there is no price that can pay for the lives of those who have died for their people. We cannot accept economic reparation; we want justice, we want those who are responsible to be imprisoned, incarcerated; we do not want a travesty of justice which allows those who are sentenced to imprisonment to continue to live in comfort in their own houses. We will not accept oppression. We do not want tombs and monuments, everything that is linked to the trappings of death: war memorials, payment for those who are dead, exhumations or museums of death.

Throughout our life, we Mothers have fought for life. We never thought that our children could be dead, we never imagined their death despite the fact that every day we lived with their death. It is not easy to accept a death, especially when it is our own flesh, our own children who were tortured abominably while a whole nation remained silent, while no one raised their voice to say "Stop". That is why we as Mothers continue our fight today so that this will never happen again anywhere in the world, so that there will be no more mothers and children, wives and young people who are forced to beg for charity. It grieves us deeply for we cannot bear to see children living and dying in the streets; we feel ill, we feel helpless when we see an 8-year old girl becoming a prostitute because she is the only one who can bring money back home. What can we say? Would we dare to ask her "What's happening? Why are you on the streets? Why are you not going to school?" There are no words to express what I feel.

This is why we want to educate and prepare young people to go into politics, to accept commitment. Politics is not synonymous with corruption; it is people who corrupt

politics, it is corrupt people who delude us. We must raise a generation of young people who will look on politics as the best form of human action, as something which will free us, lead us towards a better world and make us better people. That is why we are campaigning to launch the University of Mothers, why we are working together, why we demonstrate every single Thursday, why we work every day. We do not care about the threats, we do not care if people wish to kill us. What is life for if not to carry forward our struggle? What is life if it is not devoted to a cause? And our cause - that of our children - which means loving them till our dying day, feeling that they are alive each day, understanding more deeply what they did - gives us strength each day to get up and act, to carry on the fight, to support mothers in the former Yugoslavia, to support mothers in Iraq, in Peru, Colombia, Chile and Brazil. We shall go wherever we are called, because if we are what we are, it is because we have devoted our lives to the cause of other people, other men and women. The world does not begin and end in Argentina, it is all around us. What have we been speaking about today? Of perversion, state terrorism and hunger. This is why we are fighting, because people are ruining the world. We need to be better people.

We want peace, we want peace with all our heart and soul, but we also know that we should not go down on our knees, begging for it.

We must fight for it with endurance and tenacity, holding our heads high, wearing our kerchiefs which symbolize life, as we march round the Plaza de Mayo in solidarity with all who suffer. Our endeavor is to create new human beings who live for their people, who seek to free their people from oppression. We want these men and women to fight against capitalism which is exploiting the work of so many others, we want them to be honest, decent revolutionaries.

In conclusion we, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, echo the words of that great man Pablo Neruda when he said: "We swear to continue our fight, raising our voices to support the cause of human dignity in the face of the abject, of hope in the face of the despairing, of justice against the unjust, of equality against the exploiters, of truth against the liars, and of the great fraternity of all true combatants".

Thank you.



## APPENDIX D

“El Otro Soy Yo”  
“I am the Other”  
Hebe de Bonafini  
Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires  
March 24, 2002

Compatriots, fellow picketers, colleagues of the neighborhood assemblies, beloved Mothers, children, men and women of the University, colleagues from the Library, the Literary Cafe, radio, those which turn me around everywhere to take a picture or give a kiss to the Mothers.

Your love has sustained us these twenty-six years. When they ask where we get the strength, it is the immense love and great respect that you have for us, without that the Mothers' fight would not be possible!

Twenty-six years of the coup. Who would have said that here in the Plaza! Those who are able to sing The Internationale, those which we are not ashamed of being revolutionaries, said that to love the revolution, to sing the march out loud, to lift the red flags, banners of Che, the flags of socialism.

What satisfaction, comrades does twenty-six years ago, damn it, nobody would have imagined! These thousand sons of bitches who wanted to destroy us but couldn't! They are locked up in their caves, cannot leave, Barra had to shave his head and beard and we find each other the same. They are not going to be able to leave! And if you ever have the urge to re-join and try to give a blow we would all die that would be necessary for the revolution, for the motherland, socialism!

But again, they will not come back, will not pass, will not enter the government's house! That what we have to swear here today, in this Plaza, at twenty-six years of the coup! We cannot permit them, comrades!

It is not enough to sing the march, not enough to lift a fist, not enough to bring red flags, not enough to bring the banners of Che, not enough to put on the shirt!

Reach out every morning, plan whatever we damn well can do so these sons of bitches can't speak again, can't get out again and do not occupy the government's house! We know we live in a very difficult moment, that the comrades of the neighborhood assemblies are doing a great job. It gives me hope when I hear them talk, gives me hope.

I feel that the deaths of so many are never useless, that every time, that night of 19th here in this square I thought the state of siege moved us all.

How good my children, my dear sons! How good that all 19th came and said no to the state of siege!

How good to the 19th to 20th, what glorious days for the country where we all put our body and we take sticks of the sons of bitches, because the more they hit us the stronger we get. The more they want to impose, the more we will come!

They struck us the 19th and came on 20th and 21st, and 22nd, and every day that is necessary ...

They are good for nothing, they are poor guys that are sent, but we must be clear that if they we hit us we must have the strength to come back again! That this is our Plaza and we won it with the children, not us!

They that gave their lives, they occupied this Plaza. They occupied and do not leave it day or night!

And that is why we always find ourselves here, at half past three on Thursdays. This morning at eleven o'clock when we arrived, it seemed that they walked around there telling us give it to them, give it to them old lady you are going well, give it to them old lady, brings everything that is necessary to denounce, not only the military, politicians, union bureaucrats, the traitors who sold out, the corrupt, and above all the traitors.

This morning here, when we entered early, we felt them revolt, and I won't tell you now, in the face of each one of you! In each of you lives one of them, in each of you, lives one of the 30,000 or ten or twenty or thirty of the 30,000

Because no matter how many we are here, no matter that the march is not the largest, it is the strongest, the bravest, the most convinced, the most revolutionary!

The one that does not betray, does not join with corrupt politicians or with the bought out trade unionists. Here we are those who claim the struggle of the dear and beloved guerrillas, who are our children, who are the same as fighting throughout Latin America, to the comrades of the FARC, long live the comrades/com patriots of the FARC who are fighting for their Colombia!

Long live those without a country (Sin Tierra) who occupied the house Cardoso! Viva!

Long live the cocainers<sup>4</sup> of Bolivian! Viva!

Long live the comrades/com patriots of Paraguayans, those silent companions, those comrades who are fighting on earth! Viva!

Long live all my fellow picketers in this country!

Long live all comrades who are able to put his life and his body in this thing so beautiful it is to live thinking that another world is possible that we have to fight so that no more children die anymore, so that it won't be a house of sorrow.

That is true, it cannot be that in this country one hundred children are dying per day, cannot be, we cannot allow it to be!

We must accompany all the struggles, we feel that, comrades, once and for all the other is me, and that was said by the boys every day.

Mom, when the people understand that the town he is also him, that is when we will move ahead.

The other is me!

The other is me!

The other is me!

The other is me!

The picketers me, the revolutionary is me, those who are taking the factories is me, those who do not eat is me, we are all myself, one another coming and going, in that we are! This square, this square that gave us the name, that we love so much just as our children, will continue to contain/have us whenever necessary, and it is necessary every Thursday at half past three, and every day, and every Friday, where all come to fight for different reasons, but clearly we have a single enemy, the Monetary Fund, large multinationals and its servants who are in this country. They are enemies of us all.

We fight for the square, for the playpen, for whatever, but the lack of work is the same enemy. Those who stole the silver is the same enemy, those who do not eat is the same enemy of the retirees, of the Mothers, there are millions of motives/reasons, many motives/reasons, but there is only one enemy. Many reasons, but one enemy!

Because of that, here in this square, the voice every time stronger and I say one thing: the banks have become millionaires, and I repeat what the poet said, is much more of a crime to open a bank then to rob it. When it is necessary, we will rob the banks.

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<sup>4</sup> What is meant here is the coca leaf gathers.

Thank you.

## APPENDIX E

“¡Creemos en la Revolución, Creemos y Amamos el Socialismo!”

“We Believe in Revolution, We Believe in Socialism!”

Hebe de Bonafini

Moncada Barracks, Santiago de Cuba

July 26, 2002

Thank you Mr. Ambassador, my dear Alejandro and his wife, for giving us so much warmth, always to us mothers, and for allowing us to be here in this tribute to the beloved Cuba.

The Mothers, from the time of the disappearance of our children, were gradually becoming revolutionaries. We talked of revolution at a time where nobody spoke of it, because we believed in it, because the revolution is not violence. And if not, look at Cubans: there are no happier people; there are no people who are more content.

They are in permanent revolution, because they defend what they want, what they love. We must learn to talk of revolution, to become revolutionaries, not to be afraid of armed struggle, or the guerrillas. We love our friends in Latin America who raise their arms to defend their people.

Our children, our dear and beloved children, who gave their blood for the people, thousands and thousands of friends who gave their blood for these people, they had wonderful blood and we are not going to let die, nor will we sell, that dear blood that feeds us.

Those are the children we won't let die, not while there is still one fist that is lifted. We believe in the revolution, and we believe in and love socialism!

We know that the only way for Latin America to go is the revolution, even when they give us many times bourgeois elections, that's not the way we want to get it.

We repudiate and we are revolted by the Monetary Fund, and by the most terrorist country in the world, that is the United States. The United States is the most terrorist country, the one which invades most countries, and blocks most countries, and which kills more people.

It is a lie that is a democratic country: it is the most terrorist country! And it makes us sick and we loath that we let U.S. delegates enter our country.

Is not necessary to pay the debt, we do not have to pay anything! They must pay us, they must replay our lives and we will receive this payment...