

**HOW HAS GRIEF TOURISM RE-DEFINED THE SOCIAL AND
JUDICIAL PROGRESS OF THE MADRES DE PLAZA DE MAYO?**

A Thesis

by

SARAH LOUISE TONNER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2008

Major Subject: Comparative Literature and Culture

**HOW HAS GRIEF TOURISM RE-DEFINED THE SOCIAL AND
JUDICIAL PROGRESS OF THE MADRES DE PLAZA DE MAYO?**

A Thesis

by

SARAH LOUISE TONNER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Marian Eide
Committee Members,	Sarah Misemer
	Susan Stabile
Head of Department,	Melanie Hawthorne

May 2008

Major Subject: Comparative Literature and Culture

ABSTRACT

How has Grief Tourism Re-defined the Social and Judicial Progress of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo? (May 2008)

Sarah Louise Tonner, B.A. (Hons), The University of Sheffield

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Marian Eide

The intent of this thesis is to examine the ways in which grief tourism has changed the nature and progress of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo as an organized group of mothers who have spent thirty years searching for answers about the fate of their *disappeared* children. This thesis will provide a historical overview of the Dirty War followed by a definition of grief tourism and an analysis of tourist's motivations to visit sites of death and disaster.

With the increase and development of mass communications, people are able to research and discover remote corners of the world very easily. Furthermore, death and disaster always features as the predominant portion of the daily news. With the free flow of information, whether desired or not, coupled with an innate fascination for the morose, one is enticed to discover and visit sites of death and disaster.

Grief tourism has linked visitor destinations all over the world including the concentration camps in Germany, Ground Zero in New York and now, the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. Research indicates that grief tourism emerges in many differing

forms of tourism, cultural being the most prominent. The research also shows that visitation to such sites is becoming increasingly popular.

During the thirty years of their campaign, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo have been successful in bringing to justice many of the military leaders guilty of human rights violations, assassination and murder. Having partially met their initial goal, the Madres have continued to focus their attention on other human rights work. Their new found enterprises are intertwined with increasing visitation to the Plaza de Mayo. They have used tourism to their advantage in helping attain their goal of achieving a free Argentina.

DEDICATION

To the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. This is for you. You were my first love in Buenos Aires, and I will forever be inspired by you. When I think of all the things I love about Buenos Aires you immediately come to mind. You are fascinating and courageous women. When we first met in 2003 we were unaware of each other's presence. In these last few months, you have become a significant part of my life. I only hope that one day I can share this work with you, and you will cherish the passion and dedication with which it was written in the same way that, with passion and dedication, you fight for your *disappeared* children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Eide, and my committee members, Dr. Misemer and Dr. Stabile, for their guidance and support throughout the course of this research.

I also want to extend my gratitude to The Melbern G. Glasscock Center for Humanities Research at Texas A&M University for providing me with the funds to travel to Buenos Aires, which was a hugely rewarding and informative experience. It was central to understanding a research problem that had not been previously investigated.

I would also like to extend my love and thanks to the Madres de Plaza de Mayo who were so dutiful in answering my barrage of questions. Without their willingness to share their knowledge, I would not know what I know today.

Thanks to my friend, Christina, who was invaluable in making me understand that a thesis has to be broken down into sections in order to be manageable. Also, a huge thank you to my mother and father who have always taught me that I can do anything I put my mind to, and, last, but no means least, to Preston, my faithful study partner during the long nights and weekends that have been spent in bringing this work to life. You always motivate me to study. I love you for that, and many other reasons besides.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introduction to Study.....	1
Outline of Study	4
Why Grief Tourism and the Plaza de Mayo?	6
Literature Review	10
II HISTORICAL OVERVIEW	15
Leading up to the Dirty War	15
The Dirty War	19
The Madres Form	26
The Road to Democracy.....	33
III GRIEF TOURISM	39
Defining Grief Tourism.....	39
Grief Tourism and Globalization	43
Tourist’s Motivations	49
Performance	62
Recent Developments.....	67
IV CONCLUSION	71
Summary	71
Further Research	74
WORKS CITED.....	76

VITA	79
------------	----

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to Study

In recent times a niche market has grown in the tourism industry which caters to tourists who wish to travel to sites of death and disaster. This phenomenon is known as grief tourism. One such example would be Hold's Battlefield Tours, which was originated by Tonie and Valmai Hold. The Hold's provide organized bus tours to battlefield sites in France and Belgium that are linked to World War I. These tours begin in Victoria, London, will typically last for two days, and are principally aimed at the educated lay person with an interest in the First World War. There is no need or assumption of military knowledge, and the lack of such knowledge will not impede the enjoyment of the trip. Visits include battle sites such as the Somme, cemeteries of the Commonwealth War Grave Commission, local museums and a smaller number of cemeteries or memorials of other nations including those of Germany, Canada and France (Lennon and Foley, Dark 26). The tone of these tours is, not surprisingly, reverential with customers encouraged to bring items of remembrance.

The consumption of sites of death and disaster is continually growing, particularly due to the dissemination of current news via global communication

This thesis follows the style of The MLA Style Manual.

technologies. The world watched as the Twin Towers fell on September 11, 2001. This hugely televised event has led to the adoption of “9/11” as a commonly used term in everyday parlance, denoting terrorism and violence. Audiences around the world have watched and re-watched the moment the airplane hit the first tower, closely followed by another plane crash into the second. It is no coincidence that people now flock in droves to visit Ground Zero to remember the deaths of people of many nationalities. Similarly, the British people watched the replay of Princess Diana’s car crashing in a Paris tunnel for months after her death. The extensive media coverage invited people from all over the world to lay flowers and grieve her loss at Buckingham Palace and her funeral. Auschwitz-Birkenau is a particularly famous tourist attraction symbolic of the Holocaust. The former concentration camp attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors that are eager to witness the location where Nazi’s exterminated millions of people during World War II.

Film is one way in which to revive history and create a renewed interest in sites of death and disaster. There is little doubt that global communication technologies shape touristic interest. This was certainly the case with James Cameron’s blockbuster hit, *Titanic*, in 1997. Subsequent to the release of this movie, one could take a cruise to the exact spot where the Titanic sank, enjoy meals identical to those served and listen to music identical to that played on the original luxury liner. Upon reaching the spot where the Titanic sank, a religious service of remembrance is carried out. From this example, one can conclude that media defines trends in tourism.

This continuous news reel culture creates large-scale public awareness of tragic events and incites people to visit sites of death and disaster. International coverage also opens doors for other types of coverage such as books and films, all of which maintain the momentum by generating touristic interest. The anticipation associated with visiting an attraction that involves different senses from those that are customary in one's own environment, are constructed and sustained through various mediums such as literature, television and film.

Of late, there has been little to no global coverage of the Madres though it is highly possible that a major motion picture would revive some of that interest. While the Madres may welcome many more tourists than they are used to if James Cameron were to produce a film on the Dirty War, this may also be detrimental to their touristic appeal. The Madres thrive on offering tourists an authentic experience, which encompasses culture, history and contact with "real" Argentine life. Guidebooks are considered a traveler's Bible, and their mention of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo as a "must see" tourist attraction is motivation enough for the keen, discerning tourist.

The "real" attraction of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo is that the Madres are still alive, marking a huge departure from conventional sites of grief tourism. As a result, the marketability of the Madres increases ten-fold and entices tourists to witness history in the making, while also understanding the history of the *disappeared*¹ children.

¹ Italicizing the word *disappeared*, or any variation of this word, follows the practice of others scholars who have written about the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. *Disappeared* is a direct translation of the Spanish term *desaparecidos*, which refers to the 30,000 people who were kidnapped, tortured and murdered during the Argentine Dirty War.

1.2 Outline of Study

This thesis is organized into two main chapters, which combine the bulk of the analysis. Chapter II is an historical overview of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. It details a broad overview of the history of Argentina, with particular focus on the period leading up to the Dirty War. This historical overview, however, is not intended to be comprehensive, but to provide an insight into the political unrest in Argentina in the time period before, during, and after the Dirty War. Much of the focus is on the military junta and their particular aims of National Reorganization. While the Madres de Plaza de Mayo are known by some, they are largely under investigated.² Thus a detailed account of how and why the Madres came together is especially important in establishing a context for the reader. In this chapter the reader will come to understand the significance of the Plaza de Mayo, the Madre's political aims and Argentina's *disappeared* children. Included are some testimonies from the Madre's themselves. While this chapter is not intended to fall under the genre of testimonial literature, as much of the literature about the Madres does, however, these personal accounts of torture are essential in making an emotional connection with the reader. When a reader understands the tragedy of losing a loved one, this emotion instantly makes the motivations of grief tourism all the more palpable.

Chapter III provides definitions of grief tourism, whilst considering the various terms which are synonymous with this emergent area of touristic research. The chapter

² The two primary sources used to study the Madres de Plaza de Mayo are Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo by Marguerite Bouvard and The Mothers of the Disappeared by Jo Fisher.

addresses tourist's motivations for visiting sites that represent death and disaster, which are multifold with very few tourists traveling to participate primarily in the phenomenon of grief tourism. Tourist's motivations are contextualized in terms of cultural development and the growing trend of globalization.

Consideration of the Plaza de Mayo and its history are intertwined in understanding the plaza as a site of touristic attraction. In other words, tourists may chose to visit the Plaza de Mayo to see the presidential palace and the many other important buildings that are located on its periphery, and while there, will also happen to see the Madres de Plaza de Mayo march on Thursdays. This is just one example of the ways in which tourists may visit the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. These motivating factors will demonstrate the way in which the Madres have continued to attract tourists and how grief tourism has played a role in the changing direction of the Madre's activism. The present goals of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo include entrepreneurial politics, prevention of repeated human right crimes in Argentina, producing a safe place for political action and education, and a living memorial to the lost and *disappeared* of the Dirty War.

Chapter III also portrays the Madres de Plaza de Mayo as partaking in a performance. This performance is ritualistic because the Madres have regularly performed in the same place and at the same time for over thirty years. Through performance the Madres have embraced their womanhood and used it to their advantage. Consequently, their collective unity has empowered them through their continued determination and presence. Their weekly spectacle lends itself to having become a

tourist “must see” in most of the current guidebooks. Thus, performance and tourism are also intertwined.

Finally, Chapter IV summarizes the key findings, details research conclusions, and areas for further research.

1.3 Why Grief Tourism and the Plaza de Mayo?

This thesis was born out of a fascination with the Madres de Plaza de Mayo following my first visit to Buenos Aires in 2003. Their presence was bewildering, yet impressive, and I was drawn to a group of mothers who simply wanted to find out why the military junta had *disappeared* their children. They knew their children to be innocent of subversive activities, yet they were abruptly dragged from their homes, workplaces, or the streets and taken to detention centers. It was there that many were tortured, raped and eventually murdered. Many of their murderers have never been brought to justice, hence the Madres de Plaza de Mayo continue to march weekly. They want answers to their questions. Who took their children and tortured them? This weekly march has become a veritable tourist attraction. With this in mind, I refer back to my own experience in the Plaza de Mayo as an accidental grief tourist and incipient cultural scholar to help locate my initial motivations for this project.

The Plaza de Mayo is symbolic of Argentina’s independence from Spain and has been the location of many mass protests and demonstrations of the people.³ The Plaza de Mayo is located in the heart of Buenos Aires’s financial district with the presidential

³ The *Cabildo* (Town Council), located at the fringe of the Plaza de Mayo, was the location where the first governing body met after Argentina’s Independence from Spain in 1816.

palace also located on the eastern end. This central location makes the Madres all the more visible, whether from passing business men and women or tourists.

The first time I saw the Madres de Plaza Mayo march was in July 2003 on Eva Perón's birthday. I was a tourist, witnessing a spectacle that moved me to tears. I had read the South American Guidebook and had planned to see the Madres at 3:30 on a Thursday afternoon. I eagerly planned my visit and worried that I would be late. However, I knew this was South America, the land where *mañana* is a well-oiled phrase. I arrived five minutes late, as it happened, which was early by South American standards and to my surprise, the Madres were already walking counter-clockwise around the middle of the Plaza, white shawls tied tightly over their grey hair, and photos of their children slung on withered ropes around their necks. Ironically the still life photos made these *disappeared* children seem all the more real. I was surprised that the Madres were punctual, a fact I have later realized is essential to their protest.

Three-thirty on Thursday afternoons has been a recurring and steadfast feature of their forceful presence for over thirty years. It has become a time that is synonymous with remembrance, ambiguity and tragedy. Without such a rigorous and reliable presence the Madres would not have commanded such attention from either the government or the people. Their cohesiveness would have been questionable, and the military junta would have taken full advantage of their apparent disorganization and weakness. Furthermore, their choice of place gives them more credence.

Thus, it was my experience as a tourist that led me to ask the questions addressed in this thesis. I was reveling in the delights of South America for the first time. I was on

a quest to fulfill my many needs including adventure, culture, fun, thrills, excitement, history, authenticity; in short, I wanted to experience as much as I could while trying to avoid all the pitfalls of tacky tourism. I knew that I was not alone in my desires as a tourist. Tourists are very demanding and often times detrimentally so to the local culture. I wondered how tourism had affected the Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

As I sat watching the Madres, I couldn't help but wonder why I was there. Why were all these tourists watching a march that represented such depressing and terrifying events? I was soaking in the local culture and trying to understand the history of the Dirty War, but I was also fascinated with the *disappeared* whose absence was hauntingly real. I was attracted to their performance because it was tangible. I was drawn to these mothers and their morbid march in a way that a television set could not capture. This morbid curiosity sat uneasily with me, as I think it does with many people. I felt that all the tourists who were with me on that particular Thursday must have shared the same innate tendencies. It is for this reason that the idea of investigating the relationship between the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and grief tourism was born, and is inextricable.

I felt special to be a part, if only temporarily, of the Madre's fight for justice. In less than thirty minutes, with no knowledge of Argentine history, I felt like a bona fide traveler who was impressed with her ability to become immersed in the local culture. I was empowered and felt unstoppable as I fulfilled my dream of experiencing the "true" Latin America. If this was all it took to satisfy my thirst for cultural authenticity, I began wondering about the motivations of tourists and whether or not they are ephemeral. Why does a tourist decide to visit the Madres de Plaza de Mayo? If these tourists share

the space with a number of other tourists, does the experience become less culturally authentic? Do the best experiences come from those outlined in guidebooks? What are the usual motivations of tourists?

Tourists travel for a myriad of different reasons. Some may be in search of an authentic, cultural experience. Some may just happen on the Plaza de Mayo and stay to watch the Madres march. Some may be looking for “off the beaten path” experiences. Some may be looking for truly authentic experiences that reflect the history, culture and every day life of *porteños*.⁴ Many tourists may have differing reactions to the Madres. Some tourists may feel superior to others because they have witnessed something truly authentic. Many of these questions are central to understanding tourist’s motivations.

Grief tourism is a relatively new concept in cultural studies and tourism discourse and much about this phenomenon has yet to be theorized. However, there is a significant crossover between grief tourism and other types of tourism, particularly cultural tourism. The different impulses of tourists also lend itself to a study that is inclusive of many types of tourism and the general motivations that are common among them all. It is rare that a tourist has only one motivation and this thesis assumes that a tourist is not solely visiting Buenos Aires to visit the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, reflecting not only my personal experience, but also the experience of many tourists.

⁴ Natives of Buenos Aires.

1.4 Literature Review

Marguerite Guzmán Bouvard is the leading scholar on the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. In her book, Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, Bouvard provides an in-depth narrative that is both personal and factual. Bouvard describes the Madre's suffering after their children were *disappeared* by including personal interviews she conducted with the Madres. The inclusion of first-hand accounts of the circumstances in which these children *disappeared* is not uncommon in the literature on this subject. The focus of Bouvard's work describes how a group of housewives forged the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, and in doing so, politicized the fact of their motherhood: "The Mothers defy not only the Argentine political culture but also a society that still upholds the image of woman as homebound and submissive" (8). Bouvard also details the fights and struggles the Madres have faced against the military junta, their own friends and families and the corrupted Argentine institutions such as the Police, Church and the worker's union. Bouvard situates this historical account in a re-defined role of womanhood by capturing the revolutionary nature of a group of ordinary mothers who helped alter the course of Argentine history. At no point, however, does Bouvard discuss tourism in relation to the Madres the Plaza de Mayo.

Mothers of the Disappeared by Jo Fisher is a sensitive account of the struggle of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. This book relates the Madres' story. It contains a compilation of interviews, organized chronologically to reflect the course of Argentine history during the Dirty War, that were conducted by Fisher. Detailed first-hand accounts reveal how these experiences have transformed the Madres' view of Argentine

society and their place in it. One mother, María del Rosario, exemplifies this transformation when she comments, “For us there is only one future, to continue to struggle until the day we die, so that justice will be the guarantee of life in the Republic of Argentina” (qtd. Fisher 150). This portrait of human tragedy humanizes the Madre’s experiences and therefore helps to provide an understanding of why tourists are attracted to the Plaza de Mayo.

Historian, David Rock has provided considerable understanding of the history of Argentina, which is essential in dissecting the events that lead up to the military coup. Understanding the political and historical circumstances provides a better perspective of the fight the Madres were undertaking. However, with much of the literature on the Madres being testimonial, research was required in the area of tourism, and particularly grief tourism.

Malcolm Foley and J. John Lennon provide definitions of dark tourism. They were the first scholars to define grief tourism in their article “JFK and Dark Tourism – A Fascination with Assassination.” They defined it as “...the phenomenon which encompasses the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites” (Lennon and Foley, JFK 198). In their ensuing research on grief tourism, Lennon and Foley indicated that visitor motivations play a role in the dark tourism experience: “These visitors may have been motivated to undertake a visit by a desire to experience reality behind the media images and/or personal association with inhumanity” (JFK 198). The term dark tourism is also interchangeable with the term grief tourism as used by Sharon Slayton in her article Ground Zero - Tragedy, Terror,

and Grief Tourism, which attaches a more emotional response to sites of death and disaster. Grief tourism is used in this thesis because it denotes an emotional response to sites of death and disaster, rather than just a morbid curiosity.

The motivating factors that incite tourists to visit sites of death and disaster vary greatly. In Erick H. Cohen's article, "Religious Tourism as an Educational Experience," he describes how visitor desires are multiple. A.V. Seaton provides clarity when he describes the innate difficulty that exists with grief tourism: "...death continues to exert a fascination and motivate travel in ways which are rarely openly admitted. The central paradox of Dark Tourism is that...it addresses desires and interests which are not supposed to have a legitimate existence within the secular, moral discourse of the 20th century which is why it is frequently presented as heritage, education or history" (243-244). The difficulty of admitting the inherent fascination for the morbid is evidence of the importance of including cultural tourism in addressing tourist behavior.

Seaton, while providing great insight into touristic behavior, does not include culture in his list of alternative reasons to travel to sites of grief tourism. The search for culture, which in the eyes of many tourists represents authenticity and "real" life encounters, is most important of all. Greg Richards, editor of Cultural Tourism: Global and Local Perspectives, comments on the all-encompassing nature of cultural tourism: "Many argue, as the World Tourism Organization does in its 'wide' definition of cultural tourism, that all tourism trips can be considered as cultural tourism, because they 'satisfy the human need for diversity, tending to raise the cultural level of the individual and

giving rise to new knowledge, experience, and encounters” (2). Culture therefore covers a broad range of touristic experiences.

Grief tourism is also considered a modern-day version of a traditional practice: the pilgrimage. Pilgrimages are not exclusively associated with religion today, but rather with places that embody particular values and ideas including the religious but also the national, social or cultural. The Plaza de Mayo is a place of mass demonstration and is symbolic with Argentina’s transition to a democracy. It is also a place that references the Dirty War and commemorates the lives of the *disappeared*. In the article, “Tourism and Religious Journeys,” Daniel Olsen and Dallen Timothy describe places such as the Plaza de Mayo as modern-day pilgrimage sites similar to Ground Zero because they are sites of death and disaster.

Lastly, Diana Taylor, in her book Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty War,” makes a useful connection between the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and performance. Taylor describes the way in which the Madres used spectacle to shape their identities. For the Madres, the act of performance serves as a public reminder of the *disappeared*. The aim of the Madres’ march is to ensure that people never forget the atrocities that were committed during the Dirty War. The military was unaware that by marginalizing the “other,” (i.e. the feminine,) and by trying to silence them they produced the conditions under which the Madres were ultimately able to shape their identity through their very refusal of masculinity. This, in turn, attracted a wave of attention that was unprecedented, but essential in the Madres’ fight for the truth and for justice.

Understanding the Madres de Plaza de Mayo through the concepts of grief tourism allows one to see the implications of travel which are varied and often times problematical. A tourist in search of history, culture, authenticity and education may have an encounter with the Madres that represents all, one, or none of these desires. In this way, the relationship between the Madres and the tourist is complex as are the implications of this continued encounter for the progress of the Madre's association.

This thesis argues that as a result of grief tourism, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo have indulged their entrepreneurial passions. In the knowledge that their *disappeared* children were dead and that democracy had returned to Argentina, the Madres, since the year 2000, have turned their attentions to a broad range of human rights issues. The Madres were able to make this political change as a result of the increased revenue generated through grief tourism. Consequently, the social and judicial progress made by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo as a result of grief tourism has been significant.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

2.1 Leading up to the Dirty War

An historical overview of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo is particularly significant because it contextualizes the Madres and their *disappeared* children. Without the historical context, it would be difficult to understand the ways in which the Madres have grown or the present-day activities that they have become involved in. This charted development will be central in understanding the Madres de Plaza de Mayo as related to grief tourism, which will be discussed and defined in Chapter III.

Argentina's political history has been one that is rife with turmoil and inner conflict. Despite being a prosperous country with many natural resources and a cosmopolitan capital culture, Argentina's political stability has always been questionable. In the years leading up to the Dirty War, the period during which the Madres de Plaza de Mayo were born, the military overthrew five legally elected governments, and has ruled Argentina for a longer period than all of the democratic governments together (Agosin 428). This history has a direct bearing on the situation which gave rise to the group the Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

The presidency of Juan Perón left an indelible mark upon Argentine politics. The two presidential terms served by Perón, and the interim period, clearly mark the rise of Nationalism, which was the prominent ideology during the Dirty War. During Perón's first period as president (1946-1952), he pursued policies that were dedicated to

empowering the poor. He strengthened the Confederation of Labor (CGT) by expanding the number of unionized workers, which resulted in the CGT becoming one of the most powerful organizations in the country (Bouvard 49). From this period Peronism has left an everlasting legacy of social justice by putting power in the hands of the unions.

Before Perón came to power, labor had had negligible political influence. His term as president ended in 1955 with a military uprising and he went into exile.

Perón's first wife, Eva Perón, was by his side during his first period as president. Evita, as she was popularly dubbed, died in 1952. Evita was a charismatic figure closely linked with the common people and was labeled the 'Spiritual Leader of the Nation' for her work with the *descamisados* or 'shirtless ones' (Fraser 158). It was her belief that women could liberate themselves while embracing their domestic, submissive roles. This belief was translated into action when Evita established the first political party for women. Evita never questioned the primacy of women's role as housewife and mother (Fisher 9). In this way, Evita set the stage for the Madres de Plaza de Mayo to radicalize their motherhood. Together with Evita's love for the people, and their love for her, she was able to empower women in the same way that the Madres have in more recent times.

General Juan Carlos Onganía came to power during Perón's exile. Onganía overthrew the democratic government of President Arturo Umberto Illía in 1966 and in doing so demonstrated the fragility of Argentine democracy.⁵ However, his political style set a precedent for the tyranny and repression that was to follow during the time of

⁵ In 1955, General Eduardo Lonardi led the military rebellion that overthrew Perón. Lonardi was forced to resign and was replaced by General Pedro Aramburu. Aramburu was eventually killed by the Montoneros opening the way for Illía to assume the presidency. The continuous power struggle revealed a period of intense political conflict.

the *disappearances*. Onganía banned all political parties and all political activities to gain complete governmental control. He responded to labor strikes with military force and imprisonment of union leaders, while his interior minister ordered state intervention in the previously autonomous universities, abolishing their internal government and student federations. Onganía saw political plurality as a threat to the state and therefore, he created the doctrine of ideological borders. In this way the army's role of protecting the nation's borders was extended to that of protecting the public from "exotic ideologies," which was translated as communism (Rock, Authoritarian 199). The suppression of popular political expression led not only to a series of riots and civil disturbances during his last year in power, but also to the appearance of leftist armed guerilla activity. Previously, Argentina had only witnessed activity from paramilitary groups on the right whereas leftist organizations had been confined to rural areas where they had exerted little influence (Bouvard 20).

Understanding the politics of the time makes it easier to understand the enormity of the resistance with which the Madres de Plaza de Mayo were faced. Argentina's political inclinations were anything but democratic. Perón returned to power for the second time in October 1973. His period as president lasted little more than a year. This time, Perón's leadership style became much more authoritarian. He introduced the doctrine of justicialism, which represented Perón's turn away from democracy and towards dictatorship. "No true Argentine," Perón insisted, "can deny his agreement with the basic principles of our doctrine without reneging on his identity as an Argentine" (qtd. Rock, Authoritarian 161). Perón's political support was composed of

heterogeneous forces: on the right were the business community and the extremist Argentine Anticommunist Alliance (Triple A), in the center was the highly bureaucratized CGT, and on the left was a large group of middle-class youths, intellectuals, and the extremist *Montoneros*. The threat of leftist paramilitary groups was becoming more and more of a reality. Both extremist groups used excessive violence by forming death squads and assassinating union leaders (Rock, Argentina 353).

Marguerite Bouvard notes that both sides “were able to fund their activities by resorting to kidnapping, blackmail, and robbery” (22). It is also worth noting that one of the most significant ratlines, established to protect Nazi and Fascist war criminals, was to Argentina. Perón was a prominent dissident of the Nuremberg trials and welcomed, with open arms, Nazi war criminals into Argentina.⁶ It is also possible that the military junta modeled its practices during the Dirty War on those of the political refugees from such totalitarian regimes. In this vein, one could perhaps foresee the political and judicial foundations that were being laid by Peronism.

The country’s immense economic problems only antagonized a worsening political situation and were further exacerbated when Perón died in office in 1974. His vice-president and second wife, Isabel Perón, assumed the presidency but floundered in office. Due to a lack of leadership, Argentina was in a state of chaos. According to Sally Webb Thornton, the left and right were becoming increasingly more violent and so, the military took full advantage by stepping in and convincing Isabel that they would

⁶Argentine president Juan Perón on the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals stated, “*In Nuremberg at that time something was taking place that I personally considered a disgrace and an unfortunate lesson for the future of humanity. I became certain that the Argentine people also considered the Nuremberg process a disgrace, unworthy of the victors, who behaved as if they hadn't been victorious. Now we realize that they [the Allies] deserved to lose the war.*” (qtd. Goñi 100).

“declare a state of siege in 1974 in order to “cleanse the population of subversive elements” (qtd. Rock, Argentina 280). The definition of subversive elements was rather ambiguous. It was a term used by the military to serve their own purposes and in effect, it was a piece of propaganda that threw Argentina into complete terror. On a global level subversives were communists, but on a local level they were defined as psychoanalysts, architects, university employees, secondary school teachers, legal professionals, journalists and union workers (Bouvard 22; Rock, Authoritarian 228-229). The military captured anyone that was a “member of suspect organizations, their sympathizers, associates, and anyone else who might oppose the government” (Bouvard 23). The definition was, however, loose to say the least. The ensuing period became known as the Dirty War.

2.2 The Dirty War

The Dirty War (1976-1983) is the epoch that is most associated with the disappearances. Beginning in 1976 General Jorge Rafael Videla, the Commander in Chief of the army, Admiral Emilio Massera of the navy, and Brigadier Ramón Agosti of the air force, staged a successful military coup by finally displacing Peronism. The result of the coup was that Videla became the new president of Argentina.

The military seized total control and in doing so claimed to be the guardian of Western Christian values. The military coup also took place under Operation Condor, a campaign of military repressions including assassinations aimed to deter left-wing influence and ideas and to control active or potential opposition movements. Operation

Condor took place in the context of the Cold War and Argentina's anti-communist inclination. Their promise to oust adversaries disguised more pernicious aims: the events that ensued were some of the most barbaric in Argentina's history. The military government carried out unprecedented violence against its own citizenry and a subterranean rule subjected innocent people to murder, rape, beatings and electrocutions, among other torturous acts. Family members and friends did not know their whereabouts, or why they had *disappeared*. Many people, in fear that they too would be *disappeared*, remained silent. In this way, the act of *disappearing* was the military's primary weapon (Thornton 280).

The military junta suspended the Constitution and Congress, censored the press, named its own appointees to the Supreme Court and provincial courts, and all the while claiming that they were ridding Argentina of subversives (Thornton 280). Jo Fisher notes that the then General Ramón Camps, the chief of police of Buenos Aires said, "It wasn't people who disappeared, but subversives" (102). However, the reality was that subversives or resistance movements such as the Montoneros or Triple A had already been quelled. The military had already been *disappearing* individuals belonging to these movements for quite some time.⁷ Towards the end of Perón's rule the three branches of the armed forces, with aid from state security, formed espionage networks, clandestine operational units, and secret detention centers. They were soon able to overpower their adversaries with indiscriminate violence, particularly through the support of the CGT

⁷ The Buenos Aires Herald reported in May 1975 over "five hundred assassinations [during] the past year, the vast majority of them leftists" (qtd. Rock, Authoritarian 223).

and Roman Catholic Church, which were powerful and important institutions within the Argentine system.

Leaders of the CGT were found to have abused their power having been instrumental in the large-scale disappearances of many of the workers. The National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP), set up by President Alfonsín in 1984 to investigate the *disappearances* that occurred under military rule, provided their own witnesses and testimonies from victims that confirmed the involvement of the CGT and the Roman Catholic Church. The Argentine Church was also a supporter of the military and the Peronist government, primarily because both of these factions allowed the Church to dominate the education system. The importance of such power was to be able to infiltrate individual thinking, suspend democratic values, and undermine individual initiative and responsibility.

According to the military, subversives were now intended to include dissent by political parties, the press, universities, legal professions and unions. In effect, Thornton describes how “whole populations were ‘suspect’ – university students and professors, anyone involved in Liberation Theology or social services, journalists, intellectuals” (280). Many members of these groups were *disappeared* because they were seen as opponents of the military’s regime and ideology. However, the choice of victims came to be what can only be described as random, in the eyes of the Madres. They knew their children to be upstanding citizens who were not subversives but who believed in a liberal democracy. It later became clear to the Madres that their children’s liberal thinking caused them to *disappear*. It is reported that up to 30,000 people were

disappeared during the Dirty War. The random nature of the *disappearances* caused psychological terror. Bouvard explains, “What made these raids so terrifying was the fact that they were carried out with anonymity” (27). The secrecy of the *disappearances*, which was a deliberate ploy by the junta, also made it all the more confusing and terrifying.

People were *disappeared* in the most anonymous of ways. Under a semblance of normality that disguised complete and utter fear, people were dragged from their home, office, workplace or the streets without any hint of a warning. The fear was so great that people were numbed into a state of silence. The silence surrounding the *disappearances* meant that many were unaware of the scale of the military’s program of ‘cleansing.’ Large numbers of men dressed in plain clothes would arrive in unmarked cars, ransack homes, tie up families, pillage their wares and ultimately, drag away a son or daughter. The Madres recall “that in the middle of the night, or in the hours just before dawn, Ford Falcons without license plates would slide through the streets like sharks” (Bouvard 24). Their decision to disappear people was partly to maintain a clean image abroad. The act of disappearance implies silence as well as a lack of evidence. The military junta was keen to avoid the mistake made by General Augusto Pinochet in Chile. His blatant repression caused an international outcry. Argentina wanted to protect the image of the nation at home and abroad and in order to do so the media was forced to comply with the imposed silence (Bouvard 30-31).

The *disappeared* were taken to detention centers that were hidden in and around Buenos Aires and in provinces all over the country, and which were the pivot of the

Dirty War. The detention centers, for the most part, were housed in military and police premises and were under the immediate jurisdiction of the armed and security forces, but were under orders from the highest military authorities (Fisher 62). Yet, the junta categorically denied that any such detention centers existed. Furthermore, on December 22, 1977, General Videla stated, “I [wholeheartedly] deny that there exist in Argentina any concentration camps or prisoners being held in military establishments beyond the time absolutely necessary for the investigation of a person captured in an operation before they are transferred to a penal establishment” (qtd. Ponce). It was later revealed that throughout Argentina there were over 340 illegal detention centers, which housed some 15,000 persons, all of whose existence was denied by the government.⁸ The mothers learned of the detention centers and their awful conditions after detainees were randomly released after having been tortured. One mother, Elisa de Landin, was also *disappeared* because her son had deserted the army:

They used the *picana* [a cattle prod with electricity running through it] which is terrible. I don’t understand how they can torture another human being like this. And they were laughing because it wasn’t anything pleasant to see the naked body of a fifty-year-old woman, fat, moving like that, because the electricity makes you jump like a frog. All the time they were asking, ‘Where is Martín?’ They told me they were doing the same thing to

⁸ The exact number of disappearances in Argentina will never be known. CONADEP had some 8,960 filed reports of disappearances, all the while acknowledging that this was not a representative figure. Human Rights Organizations estimated numbers between 15,000 and 20,000, while the Madres figure of 30,000 is based on the premise that for every individual registered as a *disappeared* person, there were another two who went unreported. The Madres defend this assertion by saying that family members of the *disappeared* were scared and unwilling to make reports coupled with a lack of witnesses to support the claims (Bouvard 31).

my mother. I said, 'I'm not going to end up in a bad way but you're going to end up worse because you're not going to be able to kiss your mother or your children.' They said, 'We haven't got mothers or children.' They were just savages... There was a moment when I was about to swallow my tongue. I wasn't afraid because I said to myself that if they kill me with the *picana* or throw me through the window, death is the same. Death is only once.

They took me to a cell. They said, 'Today you didn't talk but tomorrow you will,' and this is terrible, this kind of torture, waiting for them to come back and take you again. Every time I heard the door open I was terrified. I stood up and walked to the walls. It was one meter by one and half and there was a stone bench. I was still blindfolded and my hands were still tied behind my back. I wanted to urinate. I strained and strained until I broke the straps and urinated there, on the floor. There was a terrible smell. My husband said it seemed like they were toilets that had been converted into cells. (Fisher 65)

They later dumped Elisa and her husband on the railway tracks. The reason Martín had deserted was because he disagreed with the military's violence and terror. Afraid that her son would also be tortured or killed as a result of his desertion, she chose not to try and find him. Elisa has never seen her son since his desertion. Nine months after Elisa was tortured, Elisa's other son was also *disappeared*.

Many families of the *disappeared* at first believed that there had been some sort of mistake because their children were successful, law-abiding citizens. They also believed that as soon as they notified the authorities their children would be returned to them. Unaware of the gravity of the situation none of the Madres ever imagined that waiting for their children would take more than a couple of months. After making numerous reports at police stations, hospitals and military garrisons, the Madres were dismayed to discover that no record of their loved ones existed.

Furthermore, the military-controlled media that was endorsed by the Church, aimed to engage families of the *disappeared* in a self-pronounced state of guilt. They conceived such slogans as, “Do you know where your child is?” or, “How did you bring your child up” (Taylor 198). By repeatedly insinuating that the children of the *disappeared* were “mixed up in something,” they became political dissidents and social deviants in the minds of a brainwashed public. The junta’s intention was to isolate the *disappeared* families. In part, the campaign was effective because many of the families of the *disappeared* experienced desertion and abandonment by family, friends and neighbors. Thornton states, “If a family member *disappeared*, 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, and unable to share its loss” (285).

The activism of the *disappeared* children was the common thread : the Madres came to realize, by comparing stories, that their children had one thing in common: “they all were dedicated to improving the lot of the poor” (Bouvard 176). An interview

with María del Rosario, conducted by Bouvard, describes her son's character. He was an upstanding citizen who worked hard and whose only crime was to be too giving:

As a teenager, he distinguished himself in the family by guiding his younger brother and settling disputes among his friends. Before he was *disappeared* he studied economics and worked for a company that manufactured auto parts. When he was given a raise after a year, he complained to his manager that he had received the raise instead of his coworker, who had three children and had been there for seventeen years. He quit and became a union activist in a bottling company, where he persuaded the management to give workers gloves so they would not cut their hands on the bottle tops. After the military abducted him, his boss told his mother that he had never had such an exceptional worker. (Bouvard 177-178)

Interviews such as these conducted by Bouvard reveal the arbitrary nature of the *disappearances*. The military was *disappearing* citizens whose giving nature and liberal attitudes were manipulated in order to maintain their omnipotence. The Madres, upon realizing the military's intentions, could not tolerate such terrorism any longer.

2.3 The Madres Form

These cruel truths of torture and violence never deterred the Madres from their objective: to find out what happened to their *disappeared* children. In the months after their children were *disappeared* the Madres began recognizing one another. Their roles as housewives meant that while their husbands were at work they would conduct the

search for their missing children alone, and their quest for answers often led them to the same police stations, the same hospitals via the same bus journeys. After a very short period of time, the Madres began timidly to ask questions of each other, and they began to share stories. It was not long before chats turned into meetings. Although they had always known that their children were not subversives in the radical sense, the comfort they found in each other and the similarity of their stories further confirmed that. This was not an anomaly. The mass scale on which the *disappearances* were occurring, revealed a horrifying reality. Every day they heard new stories from released detainees which spurred the mothers into action. The current President of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Hebe de Bonafini, comments, “We began to hear words like *picana*⁹, *capucha*,¹⁰ and *submarino*,¹¹ and we began to piece together the full scale of the horror. All this changes you. It changes your values. It changes the way you think...we knew we couldn’t stop now that we were discovering the truth” (qtd. Fisher 66). Despite remaining largely untouched by the military, several *disappeared* Madres also educated their cohorts. Three of their members were *disappeared* including Azucena de De Vincente, the first President of the Madres. Despite the ongoing fear of being killed or tortured, the Madres were steadfast in their belief that the military could not be allowed to “get away” with committing such atrocities. Their fundamental principle was openness because of their democratic values (Bouvard 95).

⁹ An electric cattle prod used in the secret detention centers as an instrument of torture.

¹⁰ The hood most prisoners were forced to wear for the duration of their detention.

¹¹ The name used to describe torture by immersion in water similar to water boarding.

In April 1977 with a petition in hand that demanded an answer to the fate of their children, fourteen mothers made their way to the Plaza de Mayo where they demanded an audience with the president of the junta, General Videla. After being denied such a request, the Madres told the government officials that they would return every week with more support to demand answers. Despite the omnipresent fear, the Madres began to recruit members. Within three weeks they were able to recruit sixty members. Three of them were granted a session with the Minister of the Interior. He answered their question by saying that their children had either run away or they were involved in illegal activities and had therefore left the country (Bouvard 69-70).

Incensed with this evasive response by the Minister of the Interior, the Madres have continued their weekly peaceful protest on Thursdays in the Plaza de Mayo, in an effort to demonstrate to the world that the *disappearances* must be recognized, that the responsible military officials must be brought to justice, and that their children must never be forgotten. The Madres chose this politically charged space after experiencing great difficulty in accessing governmental headquarters (Bouvard 60). As a result, the Plaza de Mayo has become their sacred territory.

The Plaza de Mayo is the seat of government power in downtown Buenos Aires. Situated around the Plaza are many governmental buildings including the Casa Rosada, the presidential palace and the home of the executive branch of government, the city council, and the headquarters of the Nación Bank. The Buenos Aires financial district is also beside the Plaza. The May pyramid around which, the Madres march is located in the center of the Plaza. The Plaza de Mayo has always been the focal point of political

life in Buenos Aires. Its current name commemorates the May Revolution of 1810, which initiated the process towards the country's independence from Spain in 1816. Additionally, on October 17, 1945, mass demonstrations in the Plaza de Mayo organized by Evita and the Confederation of Labor forced Juan Perón's release from prison. For several years the Peronist movement gathered every October 17th in the Plaza de Mayo to show their support for their leader. October 17th is still "Loyalty Day" for the traditional Peronists. Many other presidents, both democratic and military, have also saluted people in the Plaza from the balcony of the Casa Rosada. Antonio Banderas also sang to Madonna in the blockbuster hit, *Evita*, from that very same balcony.

The Madre's choice of the Plaza de Mayo is central to their fight for justice, their attraction as a tourist spot and the strength of their political voice. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo took advantage of the symbolic importance of the Plaza to open the public's eyes to what the military was doing.

Between 1977 and 1979 their membership increased weekly. The composition of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo is varied. Many of them had not completed secondary school because in the era of the thirties and forties it was only men who went to school. While the majority came from the working class (54 percent), the middle-aged Madres represented a cross-section of society. They were divided by different geographical, religious and political backgrounds (Taylor 187, Fisher 32). Yet, they all shared one common characteristic: they believed their role to be almost exclusively as a housewife and mother to their children. It was in this role that they took to the streets to protest (Fisher 32).

In their desire for social and judicial reform, the Madres have identified themselves as clearly on the left of the political spectrum because of the leftist association with political pluralism and democratic values. They are, however, entirely independent in the political sense of the word. This was a deliberate move as the right is thought of as having captured nationalist sentiment. Working in the open using nonviolent methods “The Mother’s movement is about presence, the proclamation of alternative modes of thought, and innovative political action within a system that has traditionally refused to tolerate opposition” (Bouvard 62). The Madres will only allow young people to join their association if their views are not tied to a particular political party or ideology.

What began as an informal group of mothers protesting the *disappearances* of their children, transformed into an official organization on August 22, 1979 with an eleven-member commission. The very establishment of this organization was completely radical given that 1979 was a high point of repression during the regime. The principles outlined in their founding manifesto state their independence from all political parties, their condemnation of the military’s practices of torture and repression, but also their commendation of values such as peace, justice and human rights. Their political viewpoints were totally at variance with the political system. The Madres stood out openly against the politics of the time, denounced it and called for change despite the possibility that they too, could have been *disappeared* at any time.

As their numbers swelled, they were met with an increased military and police presence. The Madres were threatened with weapons and dogs, followed home, sprayed

with tear gas or water cannons and even had loaded guns put to their heads. Despite these intimidation tactics by the junta, the Madres kept showing up. When they were asked to “move on” by the police, they started to move in *la ronda*, the march around the obelisk in the center of the Plaza de Mayo. *La ronda* is now the trademark of their peaceful protest. Their other trademark is their dress. When the Madres gather in public, including in the Plaza de Mayo, they wear white baby shawls on their head embroidered with their children’s names. Bouvard comments, “The shawls symbolize peace, life and maternal ties, and they represented the claim of family bonds and ethical values in the public arena” (75). Many Madres also wore enlarged photos of their missing children slung around their necks.

Their years of protesting and condemning the military regime resulted in the support of many human rights groups, both national and international.¹² These groups would join them in the Plaza de Mayo on Thursdays or invite them to attend human rights conferences around the world. The Madres were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by the European Parliament in 1980. As a measure of their support, the Norwegian government awarded them with the Peace Prize of the People, a prize given to those who qualified for the Nobel Peace Prize but did not receive it. This prize, however, was enough to catapult them into the international spotlight: “Political leaders in France publicly expressed their support for the mothers, Italian president Sandro Pertini spoke about them in his New Year’s message, and a number of Italian political parties took out

¹² Many groups and individuals including the European Parliament, European political leaders, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Amnesty International, the Christian Service for Peace and Justice, the Ecumenical Group for Human Rights and the Support Group for the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, which was established by the wife of the prime minister of the Netherlands, all showed unwavering support for the Madres.

an advertisement in the Argentine paper *El Clarín* to publicize their revulsion at the disappearances” (Madres, no.5. Mar. 1981).

Support from international figureheads was instrumental in Argentina’s transition to a democracy in 1983. Dismayed at the Madre’s growing influence, the Argentine government was doing everything in its power to deny the *disappearances*. In light of Argentina’s economic failings, and in order to restore some semblance of normality and democracy in the eyes of the world, the junta decided to reactivate political parties in December 1981. The reactivation was the first step towards the restoration of constitutional politics. On the other hand, the Minister of the Interior refused to publish a list of the *disappeared* and refused to provide any explanations regarding missing persons or the detention centers. Rather, the junta decided that before power was handed over to civilians, it would grant itself an amnesty.

The Madres were outraged and continued to demand that the *disappeared* not be forgotten during Argentina’s transition to democracy. Their political voice had changed; they were much more forthright in their pleas and in their messages. In an open letter to the pope in the Argentine newspaper *La Prensa*, which was published just before they were due to have an audience with him in Europe, they asked, “Holy Father, what is our place in the Church?” (Madres, no.10. n.d.). This question was particularly controversial because the Madres had repeatedly made reference to the fact that the Argentine Church had abandoned them.

The junta’s last ditch effort to win favor brought about its demise. The decision to invade the Falklands Islands/Islas Malvinas was an act of desperation by a

government facing billions in foreign debt and the first signs of disaffection among the formerly quiescent labor unions (Bouvard 119). With their downfall imminent, thousands of ordinary, working Argentines found the courage to gather in the Plaza de Mayo, the location where so many other powerful political demonstrations had taken place in the past. The Plaza de Mayo had become synonymous with dissent and so too, had the Madres. The junta's time was up and only a few months after the Falklands War, in December 1983, the democratically-elected president Raúl Alfonsín came to power. Constitutional rights were re-instated and democratic principles of rule restored.

2.4 The Road to Democracy

The road to justice has been filled with difficulty and frustration for the Madres even after the inauguration of Alfonsín. Just three days after taking office, he ordered the prosecution of the nine members of the junta who ruled Argentina during the Dirty War. It was a move that undoubtedly caused the Madres great delight and also, great anger. Hebe de Bonafini prophetically asserted that, "if Alfonsín does not [enforce] his power in the first few days, it will be difficult to solve those cases later" (qtd. Bouvard 133). Nothing could have been closer to the truth. For soon after announcing the decision to prosecute the junta, he made a public statement that condemned state terror and antistate political violence. The overriding argument of the junta was that subversives and their exotic ideologies were threatening Argentina's political stability. Thus Alfonsín, by commenting on "antistate political violence," implied that the *disappeared* used violence that endangered state security and in essence, caused their

downfall. This link was known as the “theory of two devils” (Madres, no.19. n.d.). Such a link provided implicit justification for the junta’s repression and evidence of military pressure on the new president. The Madres were outraged that their children could be once again linked with terrorist groups and portrayed as subversives (Bouvard 133). Alfonsín also ruled that all the cases could be judged by military courts rather than civilian ones. Argentine Law No. 23.049 reaffirmed military pressure on the president and also stated that defendants would be presumed to have acted “in error about the legitimacy of their actions,” for obeying orders unless they had exceeded them (Madres, no.19 n.d.). This was known as the Law of Due Obedience which was passed by Alfonsín in 1987. Less than a year earlier, he had also passed the Full Stop Law, which placed a time limit on the prosecutions of military officers. Sixty days after the law was enacted, any new criminal complaints for war crimes and crimes committed against humanity during the Dirty War were prohibited (Burchianti 136). These amnesty laws were only overturned in 2005 by the Supreme Court.

The results of the trials were as follows. General Videla was found guilty of 66 counts of homicide, 306 counts of false arrest aggravated by threats and violence, 93 counts of torture, 4 counts of torture followed by death, and 26 counts of robbery. He was sentenced to life imprisonment. He was found not guilty on hundreds of other similar charges. Admiral Massera was also sentenced to life imprisonment. Brigadier Agosti received a four-and-a-half year sentence in prison. General Viola, who succeeded Videla as president, received seventeen years imprisonment. Three members

were acquitted including General Galtieri who was president during the Falklands War/Islas Malvinas when the disappearances and repression were still omnipresent.

While some in the international community and in Argentina were celebrating the prosecutions, the mothers felt bitterly disappointed. What about the members of the junta who tortured, raped and murdered the *disappeared* and who were now walking the streets? There were thousands of military members, not just nine. While Alfonsín was the head of the government, the armed forces still retained power. The Madres were angered by the political sway the military clearly still enjoyed and although they did not know it at the time, four further military uprisings were to occur after 1983.

In a reversal of previous sentencing in 1991, and in an effort to quell discontent in the military, President Menem further complicated the process of justice when he issued pardons to all the military personnel who had been imprisoned since 1985, including Videla. Despite this public setback, the Madre's continued fight for social and judicial change was rewarded when these same amnesty laws were reversed in 1998 and justice was finally served.¹³

The Madres succeeded in making sure the memory of their *disappeared* children was kept alive. Their continued presence was pivotal in dismantling of military rule and reinstating constitutional rights and democratic values. They believed that “no less than a complete dismantling of its power would ensure a true democracy” (Bouvard 130).

¹³ In 1998, Videla, along with twelve other military officials were convicted of crimes that lay outside of the amnesty laws “abducting children and putting them up for adoption” (Arrom 310). In 2006, the first trials against those who were not tried for their role in the *disappearances* began. This happened as result of the amnesty laws having been lifted, and the previous president's (Nestor Kirchner) commitment to restoring democracy in a broken, but fixable, Argentina.

While on one side of the coin there is hope, on the other there is still grief and disappointment. The Madres have yet to receive definitive answers about what happened to their children. As one mother, Mercedes Moreno, states “I want to know who killed her and I want the assassin to be put in jail. If I ask for her as a corpse, then I am killing her, not the one who assassinated her” (qtd. Bouvard 139). The Madres always refused to accept that their children are dead because to do so would be to accept that many of their murderers continue to walk free.

However, in recent times, particularly since the year 2006 onwards, the Madres have reoriented themselves and their aims. This is mostly due to the new wave of trials that have consistently taken place. First and foremost the Madres came together to demand answers from the military about what happened to their children. Although democracy has been reinstated in Argentina, and today’s political climate is much more stable than it was thirty years ago, the Madres will never stop marching. Today they march to keep the memory of their children alive. While many of the Madres do not know the details of their children’s *disappearances*, they have come to accept that their children are most likely to be dead. It is in this light that the Madres have channeled their grief elsewhere.

While positive social and political changes have occurred, and Argentines no longer live in fear, justice has not been served when retired military officials continue to walk free. The lack of answers points to Argentina’s political instability and may also point to the Madres’ weakness. No-one can deny these women’s courage and their conviction in the face of such grave danger. They were the only people who stood up

when a nation was silenced. However, some may argue that their womanhood, the very reason for their success, also caused their downfall and that their power outreached itself. Their womanhood while an asset could also have limited them in their ability to pressurize the government. In a patriarchal society such as Argentina, women are respected for their capacity to keep the family together. The family is the most important institution in Argentina. Equally, however, womanhood does not garner such respect in the political world. The Madres made significant strides in forging a respected political space for women. The Madres' influence could only reach so far, but that influence paved the way for women to achieve greater political power in the future. The current president and first elected female president of Argentina is Cristina Fernández. The military is not currently a threat to state security and as a result of new prosecutions occurring regularly in Argentina the Madres can at least find comfort in the fact that justice is finally being served.

The Madres, knowing that they may never receive complete answers, or having answered these questions for themselves from the stories of others, have turned their efforts to other human rights endeavors. Hebe de Bonafini comments, "The Plaza de Mayo group will continue to involve itself in issues other than the *disappeared* because it was founded to fight for human rights. [We continue to ask] for the maximum, and what is the maximum that we ask for: to have justice to maintain principles and to live with ethics" (qtd. Sims). In this way, the Madres still have political influence, especially in light of their recent entrepreneurial activities, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter III. These enterprising ideas to provide younger generations with a safe

environment in which to discuss and develop their political ideologies, harness their activism, and understand the benefits of popular resistance through demonstration. It is thanks to their continued visibility in the Plaza de Mayo that the Madres have forged a place in Argentine history. No other location would have given them such credence or such notoriety.

The Madres have made a mark in history that will forever be their own. Claiming the Plaza de Mayo as their political and sacred place has become central to their continued support from the international community. The many onlookers, visitors and supporters of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo will always regard the Plaza de Mayo as synonymous with an extraordinary group of women whose activism embraced their womanhood and knew no bounds.

CHAPTER III

GRIEF TOURISM

3.1 Defining Grief Tourism

In an effort to examine the relationship between the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and grief tourism, this chapter will refer to a range of scholarly work on grief tourism, an analysis of the Plaza de Mayo as a context or a site of grief tourism, an analysis of the content in current guidebooks about visiting the Madres de Plaza de Mayo as well as internet sites that describe tourist's feedback on sites of grief tourism. This chapter will indicate that a small group of ordinary mothers were transformed into a touristic "must see," and furthermore, a site of grief tourism and will examine both the motivations of visitors to the Plaza and the ways in which the Madres have responded to those visits.¹⁴ Scholarly work on tourists' motivations will also be evaluated. By witnessing the Madres march, tourists experience history, politics, and everyday life, in other words, Argentina's "effects and products" (Lennon and Foley, *Attraction* 7). As a result, tourists feel part of something; they feel like a participant rather than a spectator particularly because the Madres will often invite tourists to march alongside them; they feel involved and spiritually connected to the Madres.

¹⁴ While the Plaza de Mayo may well constitute a site of grief tourism, they are never promoted as being so. Grief tourism, while an interesting area of scholarly research that studies the motivations of tourists to sites of death and disaster, is not a tool of promotion used in the travel industry. Rather, grief tourism is framed in a cultural context.

Some may argue that the Madres de Plaza de Mayo are still relatively obscure. During the course of my studies I discovered that very few friends and family, who would be considered as highly educated, knew of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Furthermore, there was little knowledge of the extent of the atrocities committed in Argentina during the late seventies, early eighties, and no knowledge at all that 30,000 people *disappeared*. In fact, many people were highly surprised that atrocities of this nature had occurred so recently and their sense of horror was heightened when I used the word concentration camp in reference to the detention centers that were used to torture people. With friends my age, their calm reaction belies their horror. Equally, while reports of death and disaster on the daily news are usual and expected, and do not provoke consistently strong reactions, my first hand account of the Madres and their *disappeared* children transformed the obscure into something tangible and real. Perhaps, this is the effect of the Plaza for visiting tourists. If this is the case, a deep sense of mourning and loss would be felt and would categorize their visit as grief tourism. The obscurity of the Madres was also evident in my search for general material to introduce me to the topic; information similar to that of tourists planning a trip. *The Official Story* was not available to rent or purchase in any prominent rental stores, nor was there any literature about the Madres or the Dirty War on the shelves of my local Barnes and Noble Store. The obscurity of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo makes them all the more enticing as a tourist attraction.

The pervading argument of this thesis is that visits to the Plaza de Mayo constitute dark tourism. The term dark tourism was first coined in the year 1996 by two

eminent scholars in this field. Malcolm Foley and J. John Lennon defined dark tourism as “the phenomenon which encompasses the presentation and consumption of (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites” (Dark 198). Slayton, however, adapts the more specifically descriptive term, grief tourism, which describes the emotional process visitors seek in visiting historical sites of calamity. Grief tourism is commonly known as, and associated with other touristic terms such as Black spots (Rojek) and Thanatourism (Seaton). For the purposes of clarity and coherence, this thesis will use one term of reference, grief tourism, while also recognizing that any of the aforementioned names are interchangeable, particularly when citing different works and authors.

Considering, then, the Plaza de Mayo as a “death and disaster site,” as I will discuss below, Seaton’s definition of grief tourism furthers that of Lennon and Foley by including travelers’ motives. He describes their motivations as an intrinsic part of thanatourism. Seaton states, “Travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death, which may, to a varying degree be activated by the person-specific features of those whose deaths are its focal objects” (240), demonstrating the relevance of touristic interest in death. Thus, “symbolic encounters” with death is highly representative of a tourist’s experience while in the Plaza de Mayo. Tourists witness the spectacle of the Madres marching around the Plaza with photos of their *disappeared* children, worn about their necks. The symbolism of the march and the photos legitimizes a tourist’s experience with death. It is possible that the Madres capitalize on

the white headscarves and the photos as a way to heighten their touristic appeal. This question will be addressed later in this chapter.

Therefore, the Plaza de Mayo has become the focal point of understanding a historical and cultural period of Argentine genocide. It is the only site in Buenos Aires that attracts visitors who wish to mourn the *disappeared* and/or educate themselves about the Dirty War and the *disappeared*. It is also important to note that international visitors to the Plaza de Mayo often have no personal stake in the events commemorated in the Plaza. Additionally, there are no alternative locations such as museums or preserved concentration camps, where tourists can learn about these events.

Although grief tourism is a new phenomenon, visits to death sites have always been a touristic endeavor. The earliest form of travel was the religious pilgrimage which often took visitors to the sites of martyr's deaths or to sites of miraculous phenomena. It is only in modern times, in the last 200 years, that tourism has evolved out of the religious pilgrimage as the original motivation for travel. However in this relatively new and prominent industry, the motivations that guided the original tourists, pilgrim's remain. These include a release of ordinary life habits, contact with foreign experience or heightened experience, and acquisition of meaning or significance for the traveler. Dr. Robert Runcie states, "In the Middle Ages people were tourists because of their religion, whereas now they are tourists because tourism is their religion" (qtd. Urry i).

Tourism as an educative pursuit began in earnest in the mid-nineteenth century especially due to infrastructural developments as a result of industrialization. Late industrialism gave birth to a culture in which there was greater freedom to travel with the

benefit of educative experiences. Consequently, the tourism industry was born. In the twentieth century the European Economic Community (EEC) was a staunch supporter of travel expressing it as a matter of mutual cultural exchange. In this vein, Lennon and Foley agree with the early ideal of cultural exchange: “All tourism is cultural tourism as it is virtually impossible to travel to another culture without experiencing some of its effects and products” (Attraction 7). Witnessing the Madres in the Plaza de Mayo thus has the possibility of enhancing a tourist’s cultural experience and knowledge of Argentina. Ultimately, tourists feel as though they have assimilated into the culture and, by doing so, have validated their touristic experience.

3.2 Grief Tourism and Globalization

Cultural tourism is omnipresent. It has been embraced globally by local, national and transnational bodies. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) promotes cultural tourism in order to preserve heritage sites across the world, the European Commission is a staunch supporter of the expansive industry that is cultural tourism, and the emerging states of Africa and Central Europe use it to support their national identity (Richards 1). It is a genre of tourism that cares for the culture it consumes, while acculturating the consumer. Richards describes how the globalization of cultural tourism has caused social and cultural changes:

The culturization of society has led to more and more areas of consumption being viewed as ‘cultural.’ This has shifted the focus of cultural tourism away from the ‘shining prizes’ of the European Grand Tour toward a

broader range of heritage, popular culture, and living cultural attractions.

The extension of education has democratized travel and cultural consumption, turning cultural tourism from an elite pursuit into a mass market. At the same time, growing competition in traditional tourism markets has caused a search for alternative destinations worldwide.

(Richards 1)

Many of these changing trends in cultural tourism are due to increasing trends in globalization. The increase in global communications has opened up cultural boundaries, which has increased the global-local connection. Richards describes how “cultural forms have become globalized and therefore accessible to tourists worldwide through the growth of personal mobility, the travel industry, the Internet, and the media” (3). Media correspondence continuously fills our living rooms with stories of death, murder, natural disasters and tragedy, which has us watching, listening and talking about it on a daily basis. The dissemination of death and disaster, while highlighting our innate fascination, is also advantageous as far as tourism is concerned. When a particular event is broadcast through the global media it creates a certain familiarity. Familiarity with the event or with the site of the disaster transforms it into a product of market consumption, which will attract visitors from across the world. It is likely, in this instance, that visiting that site will be the primary motivation of the tourist. In this way, tourists are actively participating in grief tourism although they may not realize it. It is possible that tourists would prefer to label it as historical or cultural tourism because an interest in death and disaster continues to be socially ambiguous.

Familiarity with the event is often the direct result of almost instantaneous media coverage. The sophisticated technology that is widely available today enables foreign correspondents to report breaking news from remote locations across the world. Thus, distance and location are irrelevant in the dissemination of news today. Even if one chooses not to watch the news in his or her own living room, daily encounters with newspapers, radio, television sets in restaurants and email correspondence make it difficult to avoid. In this way, no-one is immune from the reports of death and disaster and given the innate fascination with everything morbid many people actively seek out these reports. The comfort of one's own living room allows this fascination to remain a secret. These realistic and immediate portrayals of news events have brought the events closer in both space and time. Modern technology has created a collapse of time and space and in doing so has validated the global-local connection evidenced by the fact that many tourists are compelled to visit these sites of death and disaster (Lennon and Foley, Dark 8-9). The 'celebration' of these sites gives the green light to the tourism industry, local businesses and tourists to pursue their objectives.

An example of this would be the Lockerbie bombing in 1988 in Lockerbie, Scotland. A bomb was discovered to have been planted on Pan AM Flight 103 which killed 270 people, including 189 Americans. Just a day after the crash, "...newspapers reported a six to seven-mile traffic jam on the main road to Lockerbie; and the AA, [the Automobile Association] were quoted as estimating that they had received over 2,000 inquiries from people asking the best route to the crash site" (Rojek 137-138). This

familiarity, thanks to global media coverage, has caused a dramatic growth in grief tourism particularly in the last few decades.

In 1998, the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam calculated that 822,700 visitors were eager to see the location where eight Jewish refugees were held during World War II. Annually, the Alamo has some 2.5 million visitors to the shrine alone, with an estimated 500,000 more to the grounds. Lastly, 1.2 million people visited the Auschwitz concentration camps in 2007, to see the place where an estimated one million people were murdered (Associated Press).

How do these ideas, the result of sophisticated global technology, relate to the growing number of tourists to the Madres de Plaza de Mayo? The Madres gained significant international coverage in the early to middle eighties, at a time when the Dirty War was ending and democracy was being installed (Bouvard 116, 123, 125).¹⁵ It was during this period that they were most visible abroad, regularly meeting with various human rights organizations. The Madres also began to return favors by receiving political and journalistic figures from all over the world to march alongside them in the Plaza. Movies such as Adolfo Aristarain's *Tiempo de revancha* (1981, Time for Revenge), Hector Olivera's *No habrá más penas ni olvido*, (1983, Funny, Dirty Little War), Luis Puenzo's *La historia oficial* (1985, The Official Story) and Lourdes Portillo's documentary *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (1985) were produced at this time. *The Official Story*, for example, won Best Foreign Language Film at the Cannes Film Festival, a

¹⁵ International coverage does not refer to television coverage as much as international visits abroad to accept peace awards in the U.S. and organize support gathering missions in Europe. The contacts they made on these trips proved invaluable and many important political figures later joined them in their protests in the Plaza de Mayo. The presence of these figureheads made the Madres all the more powerful. The Madres also enjoyed notoriety through film as listed above.

Golden Globe and most notably, an Academy Award. This wave of cinematographic production awoke the international public to the plight of the Madres and the *disappeared*, and in so doing, contributed to the Plaza de Mayo becoming a site of grief tourism. However, this coverage has not been satisfactory in unveiling the Madres' plight and the facts of the Dirty War on an international level. Given my personal experience with friends and family who had never heard of the Dirty War, it seems that the impact of global communication technologies has been relatively small. Moreover, it is tourism that takes people to this Plaza. Through their performance of grief and protest they convert culture tourists into grief tourists and raise awareness of their country's history in an effort to prevent forgotten memories and to further the causes of international human rights.

Analyzing the Plaza de Mayo as a site of grief tourism raises the question of the Plaza as a site of death and disaster as quoted in Lennon and Foley's definition of dark tourism. In light of this definition is the Plaza de Mayo truly a site of death and disaster? The *disappearances* during the Dirty War did not occur in the Plaza. However, it is the Plaza de Mayo that is the heart of the mother's struggle and the location that has become synonymous with the *disappeared*. In this way, the Plaza de Mayo has become a social landmark and the place that is most associated with the *disappeared*. The *disappeared* were not taken from one specific location, but from myriad different locations across Buenos Aires and throughout Argentina. Likewise, they were housed, tortured, buried and/or murdered in diverse locations, many of which are unknown, making it almost impossible to pinpoint the place of death. Thus, a gravesite or torture chamber to

memorialize the deaths is not applicable. The very meaning of the word *disappeared*, highlights the ambiguous nature of this ‘disaster’ and the inability to localize it. One must also remember the wishes of the Madres. They refuse to accept their children are dead because to do so would be tantamount to accepting the impunity of their children’s murderers.

Furthermore, the very nature of the Plaza as “a real and commodified site of death and disaster” (Lennon and Foley Dark, 198) to use Lennon and Foley’s term is plausible in the sense that it is the symbolic representation of the deaths of the Madre’s children and relatives. However, it is an unusual site of death and disaster because the Madres are still living and still marching. In this way, the Plaza de Mayo is a site of tourism like no other. Grief tourism, from the very nature of the term, implies a tourist site where death and mourning occur; a site such as Ground Zero where there is no life except passing tourists. However, the Madres are very much alive, which alters the dynamics of a tourist’s experience. While tourists come to mourn the *disappeared* in a traditional way as they would at a museum, battlefield or in a cemetery, they also come to witness the spectacle of the Madres and have an interactive, real experience. While the Plaza de Mayo remains a memorial site, it is also a place of activism that implicates and draws in grief tourists. Comparative examples elude me.

When a tourist visits the Plaza there are a number of questions that spring to mind. Why do tourists come to the Plaza to watch the Madres march? Who has put the Madres on their itinerary whilst on vacation in Buenos Aires? Who has made a conscious decision before leaving their home to show up at 3:30 on a Thursday

afternoon to witness grief and political action concerning the *disappeared*? Who just happens to stumble across the Plaza as the march is taking place? Are they grieving or are they fulfilling a desire to become momentarily engulfed in Argentine culture? Is cultural assimilation their main reason for coming to the Plaza or is it just part of their planned itinerary from their travel agent?

The answer is that tourists' motivations are varied and are often multi-fold. J. Urry describes this: "There is no single tourist gaze as such. It varies by society, by social group and by historical period. Such gazes are constructed through difference. By this I mean that there is no universal experience which is true for all tourists at all times" (1). While they may become grief tourists while at the Plaza de Mayo, it is not necessarily the primary focus of their trip. This overlap in touristic motivations highlights the complexity of today's modern traveler who seeks a plethora of experiences in just one trip. Cohen describes how the center or the "peak experience" of the journey has been multiplied: "The Center [or *axis mundi*] has been replaced by multiple centers...What was once a journey to the axis of the world may now be only one stop among many in a tour, which combines elements of pleasure, spirituality and learning about history and culture" (Cohen, Religious 80). The multiplicity of reasons for traveling are closely linked with tourists' motivations and increasing globalization.

3.3 Tourist's Motivations

Visitors to the Plaza de Mayo seek an authentic experience of Argentine culture. With increasing globalization, a better standard of education and access to remote

corners of the earth thanks to global communication technologies and mass communication, tourists seek “authentic” cultural experiences more than ever. Richards describes, “The idea that ‘local’ identities are somehow more ‘authentic’ is deeply rooted in the analysis of tourism as well as in the practice of tourism product development” (4). The construction and promotion of Buenos Aires in conjunction with the Madres de Plaza de Mayo as a worthy, authentic travel destination, in the context of market capitalism, is an important travel practice (Bremer 29).

Modern travel practices involve various modes of transportation and communication networks, as well as a host of services and products that cater to the desires and needs of modern travelers. However, travel practices go beyond modern infrastructures and services that make traveling as comfortable and convenient as possible. Marketing Argentina and Buenos Aires and its tourist attractions is crucial in creating the desire for people to travel (Bremer 29). While the marketing of Argentina’s travel practices are outside the scope of this thesis, the growth in tourism revenue in recent years suggests its growing attraction. Since 2001 the annual spend of incoming tourists, determined as those who have passed through Ezeiza International Airport in Buenos Aires, has increased 270% (Instituto). Argentina also experienced an economic crisis in 2001-2002, which made it especially cheap and therefore an attractive destination for tourists. The dates of the economic crisis certainly coincide with their augmented entrepreneurial activity. It is possible that the Madres understood the implication of the crisis in terms of increasing tourists to the Plaza.

The fact that nearly every current guidebook lists the Madres in the “must see” section correlates with the authentic as a product of tourism development. While guidebooks come in many different sizes and shapes guidebook editors also understand the vast number of tourist guises. Guidebooks such as Insight Travel Argentina refer to the Madres and the Dirty War in the historical section, while dedicating several photographs showing the Madres’ march. Lonely Planet Argentina describes the Madres de Plaza de Mayo as the “Ground Zero for the city’s most vehement protests” (Palmerlee 73). Furthermore, Lonely Planet has a section on its website entitled “Fatal Attractions.” In a small introductory blurb, this section of the Lonely Planet website states, “It may seem a tad perverse but there's really no harm watching how other folk go about knocking on heaven's door. When you think about it, death turns out to be a pretty common impetus for people to travel... Death is inexorably linked to history and culture” (Lonely Planet). Listed on this same page are links to Fatal Attractions including Torajan Funerals in Indonesia, Voodoo in New Orleans, Day of the Dead in Mexico, Sky Burials in Tibet and Anzac Day in Turkey. Lonely Planet, a pioneer in the tourism industry, has seen the growing trend of grief tourism and recognized it to be linked with cultural pursuits; the list of these Fatal Attraction sites also demonstrates the vast range of grief tourism sites.

In the guidebook Time Out Buenos Aires contextualizes the Madres in the historical section while also using a whole, highlighted page to discuss whether or not the Madres are “Mothers of Reinvention” (66). This use of the highlighted page, photos and ‘must see’ sections are tools to not only highlight, but authenticate the Madres in a

tourist's mind. Editors tap into the unknowing tourist's desire for authenticity by presenting material in such a way that makes it authentically and culturally attractive. They are also aware that cultural tourists spend the most money. Richards states that the average total spending in the destination for cultural tourists in 2004 was \$1920 compared with beach tourists at \$1825, city tourists at \$1535 and rural tourists at \$1320 (18). Editors most definitely recognize the importance of catering to cultural tourists who have more money to spend, and who "are significantly more likely than other tourists (45 versus 32 percent, respectively) to use the Internet...and guidebooks to find information about the destination prior to their visit" (Richards 18). Thus, authenticity has been commodified to meet the high expectations of cultural tourists.

If the Madres de Plaza de Mayo still remain obscure as a cultural and grief tourist attraction then such obscurity can also infer authenticity. On the other hand, it is arguable that as a result of having been promoted as authentic, the Madres have become commodified. While "authenticity has become the philosopher's stone for an industry that generally seeks to procure other peoples' 'realities'" (Taylor 70), this pursuit of reality, however, may have been costly to the Madres' touristic appeal.

In an article on grief tourism about Ground Zero, Slayton describes the negative trajectory of grief tourism:

Within three years, sidewalk vendors were once again vying for space to hawk their wares and complaining about the restrictions around the now sacred Ground Zero. Today, double-decker buses filled with tourists arrive to view the tragedy, where sidewalk stands of souvenirs, ice cream, and hot

dogs have replaced the dust and ashes of September 11. Grief tourism has turned into commercialism, as it invariably will. (qtd. Slayton)

The sacredness of Ground Zero may be lost due to the overwhelming number of tourists who leave behind their footprint. The act of buying hotdogs and souvenirs seems somehow disrespectful of the events that occurred on September 11th, while also demonstrating the fleeting needs and experiences of tourists. On the website where this article is posted there is a discussion board asking visitors to post their thoughts on the motivations of grief tourists to sites such as Ground Zero and Auschwitz. The response of one individual is particularly enlightening. His lack of interest or emotional investment in the tourist attractions demonstrate how touristic sites are only as valuable and as meaningful as the tourist believes them to be. His answer was posted on March 18, 2007. He writes:

I'm not sure I can answer these questions about visiting Ground Zero in detail. I went for the same reason I went to the Empire State Building afterwards, because it's there and it's something to see. My friends had been there and I wanted to be able to say that I had also been there. Obviously the feeling was quite different - the top of the Empire State Building during sunset is quite romantic while Ground Zero is sad. But in the end they were both attractions and seeing them was better than staying home. (qtd.

Slayton)

His answer demonstrates the variety of tourists that exist, all of whom have different wants and needs. While it is easy to assume that tourists who visit the Plaza de Mayo

will most likely mourn the *disappeared*, or, at the very least, develop a temporary emotional connection with the Madres and their loss, some tourists may also display feelings of ambivalence. In this case, however, the tourist also participates in grief tourism. With no exact data available for the number and type of visitors, it is difficult to surmise their motivations. However, during a recent visit to the Plaza de Mayo, I was able to interview a number of visiting tourists. The vast majority were international tourists. When asked why they had decided to visit the Plaza on this particular Thursday, many of the female tourists were quick to respond that they empathized with the Madres. They could not imagine the pain of losing a child and thus, felt compelled to visit the Plaza and support the Madres. During the march, I witnessed many female visitors in tears. Many tourists stated that they read about the Madres in the guidebooks they had purchased before leaving home. One tourist was so intrigued by the brief history in the guidebook, that she began reading about the Dirty War so as to be more informed about the Madres de Plaza de Mayo during her visit.

During my visit to the Plaza, I did not meet any domestic tourists. The Argentines I spoke with while in the Plaza were mostly activists. One particular example was a group of union workers, of which one hundred had been fired for no apparent reason. The workers denounced the Confederation of Labor as unconstitutional and marched in protest in the Plaza de Mayo at the same time as the Madres. The unemployed union workers chanted slogans in favor of the Madres, demonstrating their

solidarity and understanding of the Madres' plight.¹⁶ Similarly, I talked with several young people who were working towards their doctorate in history at the University of Buenos Aires. Their area of study was the Dirty War and they marched with the Madres every week to demonstrate their leftist, liberal ideologies. While the Madres draw a large crowd of international tourists, their powerful performance is central to their international and domestic attraction.

However, Olsen and Timothy confirm that many tourists visit particular sites because not necessarily because they are drawn to it, but simply because they are marketed as authentic, "not-to-be-missed" attractions: "Many people travel to a widening variety of sacred sites...because they are marked and marketed as heritage or cultural attractions" (5). Others may simply want to grieve. Given that multiplicity is a striking feature of tourists' motivations, one cannot rule out that those who have an affinity with the Madres, with Argentina, with the *disappeared*, with the Dirty War or with human rights affairs, may simply visit to honor the *disappeared*. These types of tourists, however, are not the central focus of this investigation.

The feeling of ambivalence among visiting tourists may be more widespread than one thinks. The saying "familiarity breeds contempt," may not be amiss here. It is no secret that authenticity is in the eye of the beholder. The very fact that the Madres and their campaign appear in almost every current guidebook and are easily accessible via the internet, may make some tourists regard them as mundane. W. Brekhus, however,

¹⁶ The union workers chanted, "La Plaza es de las Madres, y no de los cobardes." Translated, this means, "The Plaza belongs to the Mothers and not to the cowards."

has identified a current trend in tourism, and has identified a process known as “reverse marking.” He explains:

Reverse marking is an explicit strategy whereby one consciously ignores what is typically marked as though it were mundane and focuses on the unmarked as though it were ‘*exotic*’ and ‘*unusual*.’ Rather than gravitating to what already stands out as exceptional, reverse marking tries to find the exceptional in what is ordinarily taken-for-granted as unexceptional.

(Brekhus 37)

While commodification may pose a threat to the Madre’s cultural authenticity, reverse marking proposes that everything contains a degree of the exotic.

Furthermore, reverse marking may be a particularly useful concept with regards to the types of tourists that are visiting the Madres on Thursday afternoons. While no data is available to answer this line of thought, and it is outside the scope of this thesis, it is a point of interest nevertheless. If tourists to the Plaza de Mayo are nationals from other parts of Argentina or, are from neighboring countries such as Uruguay, Paraguay and Chile, then reverse marking may be an important touristic practice. It is highly likely that these tourists have knowledge of the Dirty War and the *disappeared*. While I did not encounter many domestic tourists during my visit to the Plaza, a sample from only one march is not representative enough to dismiss the idea of reverse marking in relation to Argentines or tourists from neighboring countries visiting the Plaza de Mayo. Richards notes that “the domestic cultural tourism market is also emerging as an important source of development...and has become an important means of learning

about history and local identity” (12). If, however, tourists have little interest in the *disappeared*, then it is neither exotic nor captivating. Thus, implementing a marketing campaign that focuses on reverse marking may welcome a host of domestic tourists who would never have considered visiting the Plaza.

When discussing a tourist’s motivation to see the Madres, one must not forget that a penchant for superiority is at the forefront of motivating factors. Witnessing the Madres march in the Plaza de Mayo is a spectacle so far removed from most visitors’ every day reality that they regard it as a special experience. To experience the Madres “live,” so to speak, does not compare with perusing a museum or a war memorial. Visiting a museum is an activity that is carried out daily across the world, but few can say they witnessed the Madres in person, especially as the women are growing old. This firsthand experience also heightens a tourist’s aesthetic pleasure. Bremer comments:

The most authentic experiences are the most aesthetically pleasing. This explains tourists’ desire for destinations ‘off the beaten path.’ The glee expressed in finding that out-of-the-way place where there are no tourists employs a touristic discourse on authenticity that bolsters one’s own esteem as a traveler by ironically disparaging others as tourists. By denying one’s own status as a tourist, one gains esteem at the expense of others less adept in the practice of authentic travel. In a fundamental paradox of touristic practice, contrasting oneself with lowly ‘tourists’ makes one a better tourist. (Bremer 32)

While tourists are yearning for an authentic experience, they use that experience as a way to bolster their position on the touristic hierarchy. Visiting the Madres, then, could, in fact, be a tool to improve the traveler's status among other tourists rather than just as a culturally enlightening and educative experience.

Visiting the Madres may also have the effect of making a non-Argentine tourist feel politically superior because such events have not recently taken place in his or her country. Conversely, witnessing the Madres may also cause tourists to doubt the projection of modernity. Tourists may be scared and dismayed that such atrocities were committed relatively little time ago and then cease to participate in the grief tourism experience. Rather than celebrate Argentina's transition to democracy, tourists may focus on the reality of death and torture and that, in this so-called civilized world, future generations may see history repeat itself.

Another aspect of authenticity worth exploring is the Plaza de Mayo as a sacred site. From the very beginning of the Madre's agglutination, the Plaza was always their main stage. The choice of the Plaza reflects their dissent as it is the seat of governmental power and therefore catapults their strength, resistance and empowerment onto an unprecedented level. The location of their protest makes the Madres authentic in the eyes of a tourist because in the seat of grave danger they risked their lives to fight for their *disappeared* children. Olsen and Timothy explain, "Tourists...visit sacred sites seeking authentic experiences, whether through watching religious leaders and pilgrims perform rituals or by experiencing a site's 'sense of place' or sacred atmosphere" (5). The sacred atmosphere of the Plaza de Mayo is essential in attracting tourists. As the

mothers march in silence, which creates an eerie setting, they walk over white headscarves painted on the ground, a mark of their territory, and they also march around the grave of Azucena de De Villaflor, the first President of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. These elements combined provide a sense of place and sacred atmosphere.

When one mentions the sacred, it conjures up thoughts of religious pilgrimage. Pilgrimage, the earliest form of tourism, although traditionally religious and spiritual in nature, does not necessarily have such a connotation today. Tomasi argues, “The search for the *super-natural* [has been replaced] by a search for the *cultural exotic* and the *sacred*” (1). Furthermore, Olsen and Daniel describe how “modern society has expanded what it defines as sacred, bringing about the creation of new sites of sacrality, with travel to these sites being termed as pilgrimage in its own right...In this light, pilgrimage has also been extended beyond the ‘religious’ realm to include travel to places symbolizing nationalistic values and ideals” (5). Tourists are on a quest to find a place that embodies a valued ideal (Morinis 4). These places include disaster sites such as Ground Zero in New York, or the Lockerbie Bombing in Scotland, war memorials and cemeteries, such as the war fields in France, infamous prisons such as Alcatraz or Robin Island (where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned), places associated with music icons such as Elvis Presley’s Graceland or famous assassinations such as John F. Kennedy in Dealey Plaza. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo most definitely fall under the category of disaster sites that embody more than just death, but peace, revolution and justice. The Madres were born out of a nonviolent, yet powerful, desire to know the whereabouts of their *disappeared* children. They chose the Plaza de Mayo as their

political space in which to protest as a democratic collective and seek revolution in the name of their children. The historical context of their protest is evidence of their attraction as a site of grief tourism.

Personal identity development is a key motivating factor among certain types of travelers (MacCannell 1973, 1976; Cohen 1979; Urry 1990). As some tourists demonstrate a preference for destinations that are largely unaffected by tourism, travelers may also be in search of their own personal identity or, phrased differently, personal authenticity. A key motivation for travel is having a life-changing experience so that tourists return home with a different view of the world from the one with which they departed. Transformation of self is often desired, is the optimal outcome of travel and can often be achieved through visiting sites of grief tourism. These sites are often deeply moving and put a certain perspective on one's own problems, which fade into comparison with a place that represents other significantly charged emotions. The thought of one's child *disappearing* is the most horrific experience imaginable for many parents. Thus, in the Plaza, a visitor is forced to imagine the horrific experience that many of these Madres continue to suffer. This process of mourning and grief causes a personal transformation and, however selfish, often leaves one feeling grateful and lucky for the family and friends one has.

This grieving process is intrinsically entwined with a tourist's motivation to leave behind the boredom of daily life. Cohen describes that "encountering the Other as a way to understand the Self, exploration of one's heritage, exploring roles not available at home, and gaining a wider view of the world are all aspects of identity development

found in travel” (Religious 83). The expectation of transformation is significantly motivating for the persons undertaking a journey. Discussing these transformations and perceptions of self-image with others after the journey is complete fulfills a crucial component of the reflection process. Not only, then, does this validate the experience, but the telling of it becomes equally important.

A tourist believes that, for the moment he or she is in the presence of the Madres and witnesses the spectacle of their march, a bond develops, which forms part of the Madres’ allure. The idea that the moment he or she shares is sacred and special. The notion that the Madres can be a catalyst for such transformation is overwhelming, and the tourist becomes a part of a temporary community with other tourists who feel the same emotional connection (Cohen, Religious 87). This makes the tourists feel special, but often has the effect of insulating them from the society they are visiting. This group connection, which is a touristic feature of the Madres, is so important because, while the union may be felt between tourists who visit the Plaza serendipitously, it will be especially true of tourists who visit as part of an organized tour group.

The mention of organized tour groups posits the perfect opportunity to propose the idea of the Madres as temporary tour guides. The role of a guide is to take a leadership position, direct attention, frame experiences, answer questions and educate their followers (Cohen, Religious 84). The Madres assume this duty willingly as part of their role as educators. There is no more qualified a person than a Madre to educate tourists about the *disappeared*. By acquiring knowledge about the *disappeared* children and the political conditions of the Dirty War, a tourist feels even more reverential than if

he or she had only witnessed the march. One on one interaction with the Madres, which is entirely plausible, enriches and enhances one's cultural fulfillment. The main source of information, forty-five percent, for cultural tourists is recommendation from family and friends (Richards 17). Without tourists the Madres de Plaza de Mayo would have no audience. Grief tourism acts as a way to keep the memory of the *disappeared* alive through the telling.

3.4 Performance

Through telling and by enacting their endless search in the form of a circular march, the Madres engage in the performance of memory. The Madres use visual strategies as a way to mount the most highly successful and original resistance movement that Latin America has ever witnessed. They used props such as the white headscarves to publicly identify themselves, and turned their bodies into walking billboards, carrying banners, placards, and photographs of their children. These choices were not incidental, but deliberate. The Madre's strategy, like the military junta's, was performative and communicative. They knew that it had to be, if they were ever going to make their mark against the brutal dictatorship. Diana Taylor discusses the Madres' understanding of performance:

They realized immediately that they had to make a spectacle. Only by being visible could they stay alive. Visibility was both a refuge and a trap – a trap because the military knew who their opponents were but a refuge because

insofar as the women were only safe when they were demonstrating.

Attacks on them usually took place when they were leaving home. (186)

Being in the public eye was one way in which the Madres were able to successfully protect themselves from the junta's barbaric ways. The Madres also understood the importance of the spectacle from the point of view of the tourist. While tourists are entertained by the Madres, they may also become politicized as a result of participating in, and/or witnessing the march. Consequently, a tourist invests more time and emotion into the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and their activism.

However, on October 5, 1977 the Madres encountered physical violence, threats and arrests whilst in the Plaza. The Madres had placed an advertisement in a local newspaper, *La Prensa*, using their own signatures and identity cards, along with photos of the *disappeared*. They asked that the truth about the 237 *disappeared* persons be revealed. Ten days later, after receiving no reply, they descended upon the Plaza de Mayo with a petition containing over twenty-four thousand signatures demanding an investigation into the *disappearances*. The response was the same as it had always been; violence and terror. The police on horseback tried to disperse them, sprayed teargas at them and shot rubber bullets. Over three hundred women were taken into police custody for questioning. They knew that this debacle had turned into a spectacle that they could use to their advantage. It created the attention and visibility they desperately craved and they capitalized on the junta's weakness.

Furthermore, these performance strategies, conceived by women, although remarkable, do not follow the expected Latin American plot. However, their

performance works with expected gender roles to produces progressive political strategies. Argentina's society was excessively patriarchal and a woman's role was that of mother and housewife. Eva Perón embodied the "woman in the shadow" stereotype, and was faithful to her domestic role, but was anything but typical. Those who refused to accept such a role were, in her eyes, accused of "wanting to stop being a woman" and dismissed as a "strange breed of woman" (Taylor 186). In this political and social climate it was clear that only one type of woman's movement was possible.

The Madres followed in Evita's footsteps and exploited the traditional gender expectations by using their womanhood as a political agent much as Evita had done. In a society where mothers are valued, almost to the exclusion of all other women, the role of mother was attractive because it offered them protection against retribution. In other words, "the military that prided itself on Christian and family values could hardly attack a group of defenseless mothers inquiring after their missing children" (Taylor 195). The Madres became visible in their role of the suffering mother.

Realizing that they had become a national spectacle, the Madres understood the authority that the downtrodden and powerless woman could command: "Much as the military's performance was a display of virility, the Madres' spectacle was a public display of *lack*" (Taylor 203). An Argentine journalist attributed their success to having "balls." However, it was their precise lack that made them so powerful. They used their disadvantage to their advantage, making it their strength. Hebe de Bonafini stated, "I want to continue being the person I've always been. Sometimes I'm criticized for wearing a housecoat and slippers in public but I'm not going to change. Of course my

life is different” (Fisher 158). In response to this statement Taylor surmises that the performance of motherhood was the key to their success:

The performance of motherhood has created a distance between ‘I’ and the ‘person I’ve always been.’ It is as if the women’s conscious performance of motherhood – restrictive and problematic though it was – freed them from the socially restrictive role of motherhood that had previously kept them in their place. The performance offered that disruptive space; that moment of transition between the ‘I’ who is a mother and the ‘I’ who chooses to perform motherhood. (206)

A performance, however, is not complete without the participation of an audience.

The audience constitutes a missing piece of the Madres’ performance: “The Madres needs the audience to complete its meaning...and give them coherence. The Madres relied for their efficacy and survival on capturing the attention of spectators” (Taylor 207). The audience’s interpretation of the Madre’s march was essential in damaging the junta’s credibility and legitimacy. The audience at this time was not passing tourists, but political figureheads, journalists and human rights representatives. Many came to the Plaza de Mayo to support the Madres and in doing so, their participation greatly disturbed the junta. The junta was therefore forced to adapt to the increasing recognition and fame that the Madres were gaining. Audience participation played a vital role in changing the effectiveness and notoriety of the Madres, which, in turn, affected the future of Argentine politics. In more recent years, however, international tourists regularly visit the Plaza de Mayo and their participation in the

spectacle by way of marching alongside the Madres, has enabled the Madres to branch out into other political arenas. This is primarily due to the money that tourists spend at the souvenir table that awaits them after the march. The Madres have used this money to expand their political spectrum, as will be discussed later.

The “touristic experience” has become relevant in the past few years alone. Lennon and Foley argue that the interpretation of the march or, anything that could be labeled as a “touristic experience,” takes longer to become acceptable than just a spontaneous visit to the site, in the aftermath of the tragedy (Dark 10). The Plaza de Mayo is marketed with this touristic experience in mind, catering to a large number of cultural tourists who are in search of the “real” Argentina. It is only within the last decade that tourism to Argentina has grown so significantly that the touristic experience has become meaningful and relevant.

It is also important to recognize the Plaza de Mayo as crucial to the Madres’ success. Furthermore, the location in which the Madres choose to stage their performance is crucial to their identity as defined through their binary of motherhood; a motherhood of individual identity and a collective motherhood in the face of terror (Taylor 194). Their decision to take center stage in the Plaza de Mayo was a “brilliant and courageous” one, cementing their existence in people’s memory (Taylor 194). The headscarves painted on the ground and the grave of Villaflor, represent an archive of public memory. Memory is important for “a community cannot survive without memory” (Norma Aleandro in *The Official Story*). When the Madres die it is highly unlikely that their children will keep marching. However, the need to remember the

Plaza de Mayo as the site of the Madre's marches is paramount.¹⁷ Perhaps tourists will continue to visit the famous site of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and in doing so will keep the memory of the *disappeared* alive. In this way tourists become a part of the political process, which has been re-defined by the Madres (Kaiser 477). It will be interesting to see how tourism will protect the memory of a well-trodden stage.

3.5 Recent Developments

In recent years, the Madre's empowerment through performance has resulted in an industriousness that exalts their individual and collective identity as mothers. I lived in Buenos Aires from 2003 to 2004 and visited the Plaza de Mayo several times. The event was a particularly quiet affair, but moving nevertheless. Many tourists appeared at the Plaza at 3:30 eagerly snapping their cameras and participating in a march of which they appeared to have little knowledge. This somehow seemed blasphemous. Seemingly composed, despite the surrounding commotion, the Madres marched peacefully as tourists and journalists invaded their personal and political space. Despite the distraction of these unruly tourists, I did experience a feeling of sorrow and utter awe in the face of such determined women. I had experienced grief tourism first-hand but was not aware of it, nor the profound effect it would have on me, until recently.

¹⁷ H.I.J.O.S. is an acronym for *Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio* (Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice against Forgetting and Silence), and is the name of the organization of the children whose parents were *disappeared* in Argentina. The Argentine organization was founded in 1995 in Córdoba and La Plata. H.I.J.O.S. continues to make its' presence known today. *Teatroxlaidentidad* (Theater of Identity) is an international theater that was founded in Buenos Aires with the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo). The theater is committed to the search and preservation of identity as a legitimate defense mechanism against repression and brutality. These two bodies are the next generation of protestors.

In November 2006 I returned to Buenos Aires and was astounded at the changes before me. The Madres had a bookstand that had extensive literature available for sale. Many of the books were from the Press they had recently established, but there was also a selection of historical narratives about the Dirty War. Many were available in English in a deliberate attempt to attract international tourists, and there were a selection of postcards, T-Shirts, DVDs and bumper stickers all ready for purchase. The Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo also had a small table on the opposite side of the Plaza where they were selling posters displaying the mantra of the group, *Verdad, Justicia, Memoria* (Truth, Justice, Memory) in several different designs. At both tables there were a group of women eager to answer questions and have their photo taken. Many tourists were busy hovering around the tables.

Within the space of just a few short years the Madres had grown exponentially, not in terms of their membership, but as a touristic commodity. The Madres realized just how much they could capitalize on tourists eager to take home a souvenir of their experience. Just like the hotdog vendors and souvenir stands at Ground Zero, tourists are now able to visit the souvenir stands at the Plaza de Mayo. The presence of these kiosks may mark the end of authenticity in a cultural tourist's mind. On one hand the Madres may be seen to have succumbed to the pressurizing demands of the tourism industry. Consequently, the cultural traveler and grief tourist may no longer add the Madres de Plaza de Mayo to their list of "off the beaten path" attractions. However, the Madres, in their role as tour guides and educators naturally become more of a commodity. Lennon and Foley also make the connection between education and

commercialization and state it to be an intimation of grief tourism in the context of post-modernity: “The educative elements of sites are accompanied by elements of commodification and a commercial ethic which (whether explicit or implicit) accepts that visitation (whether purposive or incidental) is an opportunity to develop a tourism product” (Dark 11). While this may estrange cultural tourists, the industriousness of the Madres has undoubtedly changed the nature of their goals.

The Madres have branched out creating their own press, university (2000),¹⁸ library (2002), café, bookstore and radio (2005). Their focus will always be their *disappeared* children, but of late, they have turned their attentions to human rights affairs of all kinds. Tourist revenue is more than likely to have contributed to the creation of some of these enterprises and has enabled the Madres to focus their efforts on helping a younger generation of political activists. The university, the library and even the café provide comfortable, safe environments where students can discuss politics and reinstate traditions such as the popular voice. In this way, the connection between the Madres and grief tourism is undeniable as it has contributed to a change in the social aims of this group of mothers. Rather than reject the growing trends in the tourism industry, they have used them to their advantage. The Madres have capitalized on grief tourism as a way to diversify their aims. Such is the paradox of modern tourism: that sites have to be protected and promoted at the same time.

¹⁸ In the year 2000 the Madres succeeded in opening their own university, *La Universidad Popular de Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, which includes degree plans such as Human Rights, Social Psychology, Journalism, Social and Political Economics, Popular Education, Documentary Cinema, Social Work, and beginning in 2007, Law.

The strides the Madres have made in terms of political freedom have been tremendous. One mother describes, “We helped the political parties...thanks to us marching at the front, they were able to open a way to elections. If not, they wouldn’t be where they are today, in Congress” (Fisher 112). Grief tourism has enhanced the international presence of the Madres and has contributed significantly to their fight for social and judicial change.

Thus, Argentina has become a hotspot for tourists in the last decade. Growing visitation from international tourists has enabled the Madres to diversify their political aims. They now channel their efforts into human rights issues at home and abroad and are active in creating environments that nurture and educate younger generations without the fear of repression. Tourists’ motivations are varied and complex, but whatever their intentions for visiting the Plaza de Mayo, they continue to contribute to the Madres’ entrepreneurial success. By witnessing the spectacle of the Madres, tourists keep the memory of the *disappeared* alive, which maintains the Madres’ political focus.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

4.1 Summary

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo began fighting a military dictatorship in 1976 when their children began *disappearing* from their homes, workplaces and even from the streets in broad daylight. These mothers banded together in the cruelest and most terrifying circumstances in the hope of finding the truth. At first, they believed that their children had been wrongfully arrested and would soon be returned home where they belonged. After sharing their stories with each other and after endless encounters with state authorities who vehemently refused to answer their questions, they realized what they were up against in the scale of terror that reigned throughout Argentina.

The Madres, however, became the voice of reason and peace in a country that was ruled with an iron fist. They formally organized themselves in 1979 and claimed a stake on the Plaza de Mayo, their chosen place of protest. The junta stated that they were only detaining subversives, which legitimized them in the eyes of an unknowing and fearful public that yearned for stability after years of political upheaval. The Madres knew their claim to be far from the truth. While Argentines were too scared to have a voice and were dubious of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo for appearing to cause more harm than good, the Madres forged ahead, using the Plaza de Mayo as their political space.

The Plaza de Mayo is a space that is representative of mass demonstrations organized by the people. The Plaza is also a politically and historically significant space as it is synonymous with Argentina's independence from Spain. The very fact that the Madres chose this space for their public marches is demonstrative of their powerful presence as well as their heightened visibility. Whether seen by passing business men and women on their way to and from work in the surrounding business district, or by visiting tourists, the Madres are visible to all. Their weekly marches have now endowed the Plaza de Mayo with a sacredness that has only increased their popularity with tourists, particularly as the Madres welcome the participation of anyone including tourists.

The Plaza de Mayo has become sacred in the sense that the Madres ritually march around an Obelisk, it is the site of the grave of the first President of the Madre's association, and they adopt costumes and props such as wearing white headscarves and photos of their missing children around their necks as part of their performance. The Plaza de Mayo is also a sacred place because some tourists visit to become more spiritually fulfilled. These tourists are on a traditional form of pilgrimage, which they also may be combining with the modern form.

The modern form of pilgrimage includes visiting sites of death and disaster that embody nationalistic ideals and values. The Plaza de Mayo's history demonstrates its nationalistic heritage. As a site of death and disaster, the Plaza de Mayo, in which the Madres march, constitutes a site of grief tourism. The Plaza is symbolic of the *disappearance* of 30,000 innocent victims who were tortured and murdered. In this way,

the Madres attract tourists from across the world who may wish to memorialize the lives of the *disappeared*. The Plaza de Mayo has become a site of grief tourism because travelers are primarily witnessing the Madres parade as they mourn the loss of their *disappeared* children.

Although tourists will grieve the loss of the *disappeared* while watching the Madres march, this may not have been their primary motivation for visiting the Plaza de Mayo, if at all. Modern visitors seek culture and authenticity above everything else. They participate in grief tourism as a means of preserving and conserving not just history, but also culture and personal and collective identity. The element of performance has also been intrinsic to the Madre's continued presence in the Plaza de Mayo and has enhanced their value as a tourist attraction. However, the definition of authenticity is arbitrary. For one tourist it may be that the Madres are "real" Argentine women who represent a very "real" part of Argentine history. For another tourist, however, they may not be authentic enough. The ubiquitous mention of the Madres in all the current guidebooks may evoke a certain disdain among those searching for "off the beaten path" sites, which are truly obscure.

While visitor impulses are complex, one fact is certain: tourism has changed the focus of the Madre's efforts in recent years. Due to their popularity and awareness of a tourist market in the Plaza de Mayo, after their march on Thursday afternoons the Madres have begun selling books printed by their own press, along with posters and bumper stickers. They have capitalized on increasing tourism to Argentina and as a result have been able to open their own university, firmly establish their own press, as

well a number of other ventures. The capitalist activity of the Madres has enabled them to focus on other human rights issues across the world as well as in Argentina. The result is that grief tourism has changed the social and judicial progress made by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

4.2 Further Research

Areas of further research are numerous as grief tourism has yet to be fully defined especially in relation to the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. However, one striking area of research seems to be the type of tourists that are visiting the Madres. If one were to survey the tourists every Thursday over the course of several months, one would be better able to discern the type of tourists and their motivations. This data would be invaluable for further studies in the field of grief tourism.

Another question that remains unanswered and will for some time is the longevity of the Madres as many of them are aging rapidly. It seems highly unlikely that their surviving children and relatives will begin to march in their place. I heard one Madre mention to another tourist that they do not like to think about the future because they know that they are all close to dying. The implication being that the future of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo is extremely uncertain. Perhaps a museum will be erected commemorating their struggles, firmly situating them in Argentine history. If so, it will be of great sociological interest to analyze the number and type of visitors. The visitors to the museum, however, will be different to the types of current visitors to the Plaza. Maybe the physical features of the Plaza de Mayo will change. Historians and

conservation experts may fence off the Plaza de Mayo with its' white painted headscarves, in order to preserve a piece of history. The Plaza de Mayo would then cease to be a place of mass protest, but a memorial that encapsulates struggle and repression. When the Madres die, the way in which their association relates to grief tourism will also change. Their death means that they no longer provide an interactive forum in which tourists can witness the spectacle of their march. Being alive is inherently part of their attraction, so upon their death, the marketing of the touristic experience will change. It begs the question of whether tourists remain interested. The Madres' performance as an archive of public memory only highlights their fragility, which could be expanded using Diana Taylor as the principal source.

WORKS CITED

- Agosin, Marjorie. "A Visit to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo." Human Rights Quarterly 9.3 (1987): 426-435.
- Arrom, Silvia Marina. "Women's Resist Dictatorship: Voices from Latin America." Women's History Review 11.2 (2002): 309-314.
- Associated Press, The. "2007 Sees Record Number of Visitors at Auschwitz Extermination Camp." 7 Jan 2008. 31 Jan 2008. <<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=942455&contrassID=1&subContrassID=1>>
- Bouvard, Marguerite Guzmán. Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Oxford: SR Books, 2004.
- Brekhus, W. "A Sociology of the Unmarked: Redirecting our Focus." Sociology Theory 16 (1998): 34-51.
- Bremer, Thomas S. "Sacred Spaces and Tourist Spaces." Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys. New York: Routledge, 2006. 25-36.
- Burchianti, Margaret E. "Building Bridges of Memory: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Cultural Politics of Maternal Memories." History and Anthropology 15.2 (2004): 133-150.
- Cohen, Erik H. "A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences." Sociology 13 (1979): 179-201.
- Cohen, Erik H. "Religious Tourism as an Educational Experience." Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys. New York: Routledge, 2006. 78-94.
- Fisher, Jo. The Mothers of the Disappeared. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1989.
- Fraser, Nicholas and Marysa Navarro. Evita: The Real Life of Eva Perón. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996.
- Goñi, Uki. The Real Odessa: Smuggling the Nazis to Perón's Argentina. New York: Granta, 2003.
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censura. Encuesta de Turismo Internacional. 27 Feb 2008. www.indec.gov.ar 2001-2007.

- Kaiser, Susana. "Why Women's Day?" Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice 18: 475-477.
- Lawrence, Rachel, ed. Insight Guides Argentina. Insight Guides, 2007.
- Lennon, J.J., and Malcolm Foley. "JFK and Dark Tourism – A Fascination with Assassination." International Journal of Heritage Studies 2:4 (1996): 198-211.
- Lennon, J.J., and Malcolm Foley. Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster. London: Continuum, 2000.
- Lonely Planet. "Fatal Attractions." 29 Feb 2008.
<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/theme/fatal_attractions/>
- MacCannell, Dean. "Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings." American Journal of Sociology 79.3 (1973): 589-603.
- MacCannell, Dean. The Tourist: A New Theory of Leisure Class. New York: Schocken, 1976.
- Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Boletín Informativo. no.1. n.d.
- Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Boletín Informativo. no.5. Mar. 1981.
- Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Boletín Informativo. no.10. n.d.
- Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Boletín Informativo. no.19. n.d.
- Madres: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, Las. Dirs Lourdes Portillo and Susana Muñoz. Xóchitl Films, 1985.
- Morinis, E.A. "Introduction: The Territory of the Anthropology of Pilgrimage." Morinis, A, ed. Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992. 1-31.
- The Official Story. Dir Luis Puenzo. Perf. Héctor Alterio, Norma Aleandro, Chunchuna Villafañe, Hugo Arana and Guillermo Battaglia. Koch Lorber Films, 1985.
- Olsen, Daniel H. and Timothy Dallen J. "Tourism and Religious Journeys." Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys. New York: Routledge, 2006. 1-23.
- Palmerlee, Danny and Sandra Bao, Andrew Dean Nystrom, Thomas Kohnstamm, Lucas Vidgen, eds. Lonely Planet Argentina. Lonely Planet Publications, 2005.

- Ponce, Carlos, ed. Gente. 22 Dec. 1977.
- Richards, Greg, ed. Cultural Tourism: Global and Local Perspectives. New York: The Haworth Hospitality Press, 2007.
- Rock, D. Argentina 1516-1987: From Spanish Colonization to Alfonsín. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.
- Rock, D. Authoritarian Argentina. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Rojek, C. Ways of Seeing – Modern Transformations in Leisure and Travel. London: Macmillan, 1993.
- Runciman, Cathy, ed. Time Out Buenos Aires. Time Out Publications, 2006.
- Seaton, A.V. “Guided by the Dark: From Thanatopsis to Thanatourism.” IJHS 2.4 (1996): 234-244.
- Sims, Calvin. “The Rock, Unyielding, of the Plaza de Mayo.” 2 Mar 1996. 5 Feb 2008. <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B05EEDF1439F931A35750C0A960958260>>
- Slayton, Sharon. L. “Ground Zero - Tragedy, Terror, and Grief Tourism.” 3 July 2006. 17 February 2008. <<http://www.grief-tourism.com/ground-zero-tragedy-terror-and-grief-tourism/>>
- Taylor, Diana. Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty War.” London: Duke University Press. 1997.
- Thornton, Sally Webb. “Grief Transformed: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo.” Omega 41.4 (2000): 279-289.
- Tomasi, L. “Homo Viator: From Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism Via the Journey.” Swatos, W.H. and L. Tomasi, eds. From Medieval Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002. 1-24.
- Urry, J. The Tourist Gaze. London: Sage, 1990.

VITA

Name: Sarah Louise Tonner

Address: Villa St. Hubert,
La Roque de Moulinet,
Le Soulié,
France, 34330

Email Address: sarahtonner1@yahoo.com

Education: B.A. (Hons), Hispanic Studies, The University of Sheffield, 2005
M.A., Comparative Literature and Culture, Texas A&M University,
2008

Professional Experience: Special Projects Editor, The Bryan-College Station Eagle, 2007-2008
Research Assistant, Texas A&M Cervantes Project, 2006-2007
Marketing/QA Assistant, Datalog Technologies, 2005-2006

Publications: Own column published weekly in The Bryan/College Station Eagle,
2007
Feature articles in Better Health and Living and From House to Home
Magazines, 2007-2008
Edit all special sections for The Bryan/College Station Eagle
including commemorative section on the George Bush Library
“The Mothers of the Disappeared” and “Winding your Way through
the Andes,” Viva Travel Guides, 2006
“Studying Abroad in Buenos Aires,” Transitions Abroad, 2005