Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Then and Now: A Comparative Analysis of its Fractured Factions and Lasting Symbolism in Buenos Aires, Argentina

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Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Then and Now:

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Background

Research Questions

- What ideas and actions separate the three groups?
- Is finding their sons and daughters (los desaparecidos) still the primary goal of each faction?
- Is there collaboration between the three groups for relevant human rights advocacy?
- How are the Madres de Plaza de Mayo remembered in Buenos Aires? Does the fracturing of the original organization affect this legacy in the public mentality?
- What does the future hold for each group?

Methods and Materials

My research was primarily conducted through personal interviews with members of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo groups. Archival research and direct visits to the offices of each organization, desaparecido memorials, and other advocacy organizations associated with the history and work of the Madres were also methods of collecting this information. Furthermore, documenting my progress through photography took on a highly important function throughout my time in Buenos Aires.

Conclusions

I have concluded that although the Madres de Plaza de Mayo were originally united by their protests to learn the fates of their disappeared children, after the return to democracy in 1983 the divisions formed over the dilemma of how to define and achieve justice in post-conflict Argentina. Although the symbolism of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo is ubiquitous around the streets and culture of Buenos Aires, very few outside of the human rights community understand the complexity of the differences between each faction. Instead, the bravery and perseverance shown by the original Madres de Plaza de Mayo movement has transformed into a means for Argentines to simultaneously confront the horrors of the past while building national pride through the symbolism of the group’s white scarves. As for the future, members of las Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora and la Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo are largely uncertain as to what will happen to their organizations once the original mothers pass away, given that their work is largely symbolic at this point. The Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, however, are confident that their work will continue as long as there are still stolen babies of the disappeared who have yet to have their original identities restored.

Research and photographs by Sondra Anton

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