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:

1977
Argentina’s Dirty War

2015
Weekly Marches Continue
Permanent Presence in Plaza de Mayo
Visibility through Street Art

Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora
La Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo
Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo

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Acknowledgements:
First and foremost, thank you to Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora, La Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, and Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo for their time and kindness in granting me interviews and for allowing me to photograph their members, their offices, and their activities. Also, thank you to María Luisa Ortiz and the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Santiago, Chile for their guidance in my research on human rights and justice in the Southern Cone. Thank you to Evelyn Viagiuliano and the Línea Plaza-Sánchez family for their overwhelming support throughout my time in South America. Thank you to Washington University in St. Louis and their Office of Undergraduate Research, specifically Ms. Kristen Sobotka, for their financial assistance, and to my advisor Professor Ignacio Sánchez-Prado for his supervision. And, as always, thank you to my parents, Elizabeth and E.S. Anton, for their endless support and encouragement to explore new cultures.

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 served as 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.