

**Motherhood and Political Action during
Argentina's Dirty War:
An Analysis of Argentinean Feminine Literature**

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Throughout the period known as the “Dirty War,” Argentina faced one of the most horrific episodes of military oppression and human rights violations in the Americas during the twentieth century. From 1976 to 1983, the Military “Proceso” that ran the government of Argentina was responsible for the deaths of an estimated 30,000 people who were deemed a threat to the social, political and economic security of the country (Partnoy 16). Dictator Jorge Videla, who ruled from 1976 to 1981, was convinced that an all-out war on subversion was necessary to save Argentinean society, so his regime rejected the Constitution and imposed a system of state terrorism. The Proceso’s “Doctrine of War” consisted of four central strategies: first, the physical elimination of the armed resistance movements; second, the implementation of generalized terror among the population to discourage subversive behaviors; third, a policy of systematically enforced disappearances of any person suspected of opposing the regime; and fourth, the dissemination of an ideological orientation rooted in the defense of tradition and family (Hodges 180). To achieve its goals, the government used imprisonment, torture, and murder to demoralize and intimidate the population into submission and remove any political opposition.

The military junta led by Videla was not solely focused on the actions of men. Women were viewed as a potentially extremely dangerous threat to the government’s authority. The government-sponsored magazine *Somos* captures this general attitude, stating that

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the woman is *as* or *more* important than the man. She serves as ideologue, she serves as combatant, she infiltrates all spaces (even the most innocent, the most frivolous, the most banal), she seduces, lies, informs, gets information, indoctrinates, “keeps a lookout,” and defends herself by attacking the most permeable facets of human sensibility: the respect for pregnancy, maternity, and natural feminine fragility. (Jetter et al. 185)

Working on these assumptions, the Proceso sought to encourage obedience and submission in women through appealing to women’s sense of motherly duty (Jetter et al. 184). The government promoted the image of the “good” mother as those women who were nonpolitical, confined to the private sphere, and primarily concerned with the care and protection of their children and husband. On the other hand, politically active women, or women who ventured outside of the private domain, were associated with deviance and subversion. These women were deemed to be “bad” mothers who abandoned their families and children for a life of radicalism and immorality. The junta used these narrow definitions of good and bad mothers to justify the imprisonment, torture, murder, and kidnapping the children of thousands of women during Argentina’s Dirty War.

Just as the government used perceptions of motherhood to rationalize its actions, the women who did become involved in politics responded by using similar concepts of motherhood to justify, define, and encourage political action against the State. Ironically, these women transformed to their advantage the maternal image that was already conveyed by the junta, claiming it was their responsibilities as “good” mothers — to care for and to protect their children — that led them to become politically active (Jetter et al. 187). They used this maternal role strategically, realizing that becoming mothers and speaking out as mothers gave women more credibility in a patriarchal society than they would have as individuals (Jetter et al. 4).

Because the government’s and the opposition’s definitions of motherhood share the central idea that a woman’s role is primarily to defend her children and family, the difference between these two depictions of mothers is thus focused not on what mothers do, but on

where they do it. The patriarchal concept of motherhood confined women to the private sphere, while the resistance's emerging perception of motherhood brought mothers into the public and political realms. As women became more publicly and politically involved, they had to re-examine their roles as mothers in terms of their political action. To better understand how the maternal role was shaped by political action during the Dirty War, we can look to the literature written during this period in Argentina. Specifically, issues of motherhood play a central role in the literary works that portray the female perspective on the military government. For this analysis I have decided to examine the theme of motherhood during the Proceso in three works: *Conversación al Sur* (1981) by Marta Traba, *El Fin de la Historia* (1996) by Liliana Heker, and *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival* (1986) by Alicia Partnoy.

Motherhood as Justification for Political Action

One of the main relationships between motherhood and political action that becomes evident in the novels is the use of motherhood as a justification for political action. Many mothers did not view the society created during the Proceso as an environment in which they wanted to raise their children. They could no longer fulfill their maternal obligations to protect their children while at the same time adhering to the patriarchal image of a good, or nonpolitical and submissive, woman. For this reason, these women found themselves becoming involved in resistance groups that sought to bring about political and societal changes in Argentina. Political action and participation in anti-government activities was for these women an extension of their maternal desire to protect their children — protecting them from an unjust and oppressive society.

Two characters from the novels exemplify this attitude towards the relationship between motherhood and political action. In her autobiographical collection of short stories and poems about her prison experience entitled *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival* (1986), Alicia Partnoy makes various references, some very subtle, to motherhood. However, when it comes to explaining her political activism, Partnoy is quite clear. In the introduction to *The Little School*, Partnoy states, “the coup triggered my rage, and I decided to become

more militant. That decision meant risking my life. My daughter, Ruth, was nine months old. My answer to my own fears was that I had to work for a better society for the sake of my child's future" (13). Partnoy sees her involvement in resistance activities as a necessary way of keeping her daughter safe by trying to create a more just, secure, and free society. Her primary concern was not her own life and well being, but that of her daughter. Partnoy's daughter and her role as a mother also gave her the strength to endure any hardships associated with resistance and imprisonment. In a later interview she recalls,

I remember my mother asking me, "but what about your child?" We all know we could get arrested and disappeared. And I'd tell my mother, "It's because of my child that I am doing this." My daughter gave me strength. I was willing to risk everything for her. (Jetter et al. 198)

Within Partnoy's work, this strength and happiness she draws from her daughter, or at least from the memories of her daughter, are evident in several of her stories. For example, in the chapter entitled "A Puzzle" the reader gets a glimpse of one of the few instances in which Partnoy seems to be at peace and even feels joy while in prison, and it all stems from her relationship with her daughter. Partnoy tries, though unsuccessfully, to remember her daughter's face, and is reminded of the moments she and Ruth spent together, her laugh, her childlike wisdom, her smile. Later in the chapter, when describing a puppy the guards allowed her to briefly play with, she writes:

He allowed me to keep it on my bed for a while. It was playful and sweet, like my baby. I felt so good that afternoon that I wanted to laugh. It was not like the urge to laugh that I experience when I'm nervous or when I use black humor to shield myself. It was a feeling almost close to happiness. While caressing the puppy, I thought of Ruth. Then, I didn't worry about trying to remember her face; I just wanted to reminisce about being close to her, to recall that warm tingling in my blood. (78)

This story demonstrates that her daughter's well being and future motivated Partnoy to speak out against the government and its oppressive practices, and provides her with the needed strength to survive.

Another work in which the author portrays women using their motherhood to justify their political involvement is the novel *El Fin de la Historia* (1996) by Liliana Heker. The novel's protagonist, Leonora, who is imprisoned due to her associations with opposition groups, makes several references to the connection between her daughter and her political participation. One of the most straightforward examples comes from one of Leonora's many conversations with her torturer, el Escualo. In this instance, they discuss a poem, "Carta a mi hijo," written by someone imprisoned by the government. El Escualo questions Leonora about the references made by the poem's author about the torture he receives during his incarceration at the hands of the junta. El Escualo condemns the prisoner's indications of torture as subversive and immoral behavior. Leonora, however, identifies with the poem on a different level. She responds to his interrogation,

I did not interpret the words that way – says the prisoner; she tries to keep her voice calm – I interpreted it as a metaphor. A man that is talking to his son, who says that he would suffer through anything as long as his son were happy – she lifts her head with pride - I would do the same...and I am sure that you would to the same as well. (Heker 137, my translation)

In this scene, Leonora describes a man who is willing to suffer in any way as long as his child is happy, and she is doing the same for her child. She then goes on to say that even el Escualo would make sacrifices to ensure the safety and happiness of his own children. Leonora is willing to endure the consequences of her political participation in hopes that her actions will in some way benefit her daughter in the future.

The characters of Alicia and Leonora are both directly involved with the militant resistance groups that attack the government and spread anti-*junta* propaganda. However, such were not the only women who took their maternal roles into a more public and political arena

on account of their children. The mothers of the disappeared — the men, women, and children who had been arrested by the government and never heard from again — began to speak out against their government and the gross injustices being committed in their country. These women had no strong political ideologies or predispositions for activism, but they became involved directly because of the loss of their loved ones. This new role for mothers is personified by las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. In 1977, these mothers took to the public streets and squares of Buenos Aires to openly protest the military regime, chanting the names of their missing children and grandchildren and demanding information about their whereabouts and conditions. Although there have been many accounts of these mothers' stories, one of the best literary depictions of las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo is found in Marta Traba's novel *Conversación al Sur* (1981). Traba effectively portrays the desperation and dedication of these women in her descriptions of las Madres. In one of the many conversations between the novel's two protagonists, Irena and Dolores, Irena describes her experience with las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo:

What a hell it was, Dolores! A new hell, invented, that until now had occurred to no one. Without saying anything, without yelling, the women lifted the photos as high as possible...and it was then that this inexplicable thing began, Dolores. What would I say? That then someone began to yell and the yelling multiplied and in minutes the plaza was only one scream?...I began to yell as well, I do not know what to tell you, because I did not understand a word of what the others were yelling either, because the words were like strands of sobs and howls. I thought I heard every now and again "where are they?" "where are they?" but I could have imagined it. Nevertheless they must ask something that mobilized the general rage, because the mass of women moved forward, like a tide. (88, my translation)

This passage truly captures many of the key aspects of las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo as a movement that served many purposes. Primarily, it helps illustrate the emotional condition of the women involved. These are not women with strong political views who have come

together to protest the party in power, but grieving mothers who have lost their children and come together as a way to find some sort of resolve in their actions. The passage poetically describes the strength such mothers found as a united group. Involvement in these demonstrations pushed women forward, not just physically, but symbolically as new and important players in the political and public fields. The use of the phrase “como una marea,” like a tide, emphasizes that this movement was both powerful and unstoppable.

It is these two aspects of las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo – moving women forward politically and helping them come together as women to heal, that serve as the main functions of the movement in relation to motherhood and political action. The first function that will be examined is how las Madres brought women and a “women’s issue” into the public and political sphere. In Traba’s novel, thousands of women join a weekly demonstration, adding the names of their loved ones to the list of disappeared, their voices to the call for justice, and their bodies to the sea of protesters. The character Elena exemplifies the many women who found political activity in the Plaza de Mayo a way of coping with the loss of their children and identities as mothers. After her daughter, Victoria, was abducted by the police, Elena initially becomes consumed by grief for her missing daughter and her own inability to protect her. Elena soon realizes, however, that if there is to be any hope for Victoria, she must not give up trying to find her. Traba describes Elena’s revelation when she writes,

She spent many days in bed, without moving; now and again she would go down to have some coffee and nibble a cookie. Everything she ate, she vomited. But upon waking up one morning, she realized that she was never going to find Victoria this way, and that abandoning the search for her was the same as announcing her death. (82, my translation)

Elena then joins las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in their fight to attain justice for their children. This fight must be fought outside the world in which Elena and other mothers are accustomed. They can not contest the junta from the confines of the home; instead, they must act in a way, and in a place, where the government and society would

have to take notice. Since the junta takes their children in the name of politics, they in turn become political, and utilize one of the oldest and most effective forms of political action – publicly protesting the government.

By physically partaking in political activism, las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo brought the issue of motherhood into politics. As Nora Domínguez notes in her article “Un Mapa Hecho de Espacios y Mujeres,”

The passage... that these women realized through their political action, transformed the concept of motherhood, taking it from the privacy of the home to return it, redefined to society. Transformed as well were women's places and the ways in which they could be political. (214, my translation)

Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo were specifically acting as mothers, strategically using their motherhood as a means of achieving their political goals. To do this, the mothers reshaped the image of the “appropriate” role for mother created by the state. They used the government's definition of a good mother as reasoning for their actions, claiming that by taking action against the state for the sake of their disappeared sons and daughters they were only protecting their children. Las Madres further used their motherhood as a political strategy through taking advantage of more stereotypical representations of mothers. They modeled themselves after the Virgin Mary by wearing white scarves on their heads, and taking on more traditionally acceptable feminine qualities, such as self-sacrifice, suffering, and irrationality (Jetter et al. 189). All of this was done to portray the mothers as innocent and powerless sufferers, and draw society's attention to the cruelty and injustice of the government to which they were pleading. Despite this outward show, las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo were actually defying traditional roles for mothers by giving mothers, and women in general, more political influence and a public voice.

Although las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo played the part of the powerless victims, in reality they had a great amount of power in bringing women together to help them reclaim their identities as

mothers. These healing and uniting abilities are the second main function of the Madres movement. These women had not only lost their children, but it was as if their children, and subsequently their motherhood, had been erased. In the eyes of the government they no longer existed. Las Madres tried to take back what they had lost by distributing the names of the disappeared, publicly displaying images of their sons and daughters, and refusing to forget or give up on their children. This helped them to cope with both the loss of their children and their identities. By reminding the government, society, and themselves of the lives and stories of their disappeared children, mothers, like Elena, were able to put aside simply grieving for their children. Las Madres provided comfort and support for women who were all in the same horrific situation, and their action gave them a sense of purpose as mothers fighting to protect their children.

Reclaiming their motherhood and uniting to speak out specifically as mothers gave the women more power and credibility to fight the junta. As las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo transformed the notion of motherhood over time to become a more political as well as biological definition, more and more women began to participate in and support the movement. They did not consider themselves as mothers of specific individuals, but of all the disappeared (Jetter et al. 189). This concept is evident in *Conversación al Sur* when Traba describes how Irene, who does not actually have a disappeared child herself, cannot help but join in the protest. Irene tells Dolores, “And you would probably smile when I tell that I, who had nothing to do with anything, began to yell as well, I do not know what to tell you, because I did not understand a word of what the others were yelling either” (89, my translation). Although Irene initially thinks that the protest has nothing to do with her, and she can not even understand what is being said around her, the sight of the names, the photographs, and the grieving women, compel her, as a mother, to join the other women. Irene’s experience with las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo helps her to become aware of a situation she has been turning her back on. Although Irene herself has been victimized by the junta and is at risk of losing her own son to the military government in Chile, it is not until her experience with las Madres that she becomes consciously aware of the reality of the gross number of injustices committed by the government and society’s

unwillingness to confront the problems. She is amazed by the determination of these “madwomen” not only to take on the government, but also to face their own pain caused by the loss of their loved ones and, in some way, to find strength and restoration in this mutual suffering. Irene’s encounter with las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo is an important episode in the novel because it marks a major transition in Irene’s character. Prior to experiencing las Madres, Irene lives in a world of frivolity and denial, not overly concerning herself with the realities of the political situation and the imminence of her own son’s arrest. Afterwards, she becomes the character to whom the reader is initially introduced – the woman hiding away in her apartment, who is very much aware of the fragility of life and the importance of the connection that exists between those with shared experiences.

Although las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo were able to change the roles of mothers and women in politics, they had to overcome the State’s opposition in order to find any success in their mission. The junta sought to keep women silent and invisible by reinforcing patriarchal stereotypes of women as non-political and non-public. When las Madres broke away from these stereotypes and took their bodies and voices to the public arena, the junta sought a different means of silencing these women. Because there were too many Madres for the government to simply arrest or shoot, it removed the women’s influence by pretending to disregard them entirely and refraining from reacting openly to their demonstrations. The junta made political subversives disappear by killing them, and tried to erase the existence of las Madres by forcing the country to ignore them. Traba captures this when she writes, “the Plaza de Mayo was erased from the map during the two or three hours of Thursday’s habitual protests” (87, my translation). The novel depicts the Plaza de Mayo as completely deserted except for the protesters, with not a soul to actually hear the mothers’ pleas, see the faces of their missing children, or read the names of the thousands of disappeared. Despite the junta’s efforts to put a stop to the demonstrations by making the women feel as though they were being completely ignored by the government and society, more and more women continued to join las Madres and the movement grew to encompass not only the weekly public demonstrations, but also to include transmitting prisoner information nationally and raising

money to allow families to travel around the country to ask about their missing relatives and to help support the orphans of the disappeared (Jetter et al. 191). The government's failure to contain las Madres and "erase" them figuratively eventually led to efforts to erase them literally by arresting and killing many of the leaders or prominent figures associated with the movement.

Motherhood as Part of the Revolution

The second relationship between motherhood and political action that is evident in the novels chosen for this discussion is the view that motherhood is itself a form of revolutionary activism. This view was adopted by many young, politically active women. Politics and the struggle against el Proceso became a central element of their lives and identities. Because of this, these women recognized no separation between motherhood and activism (Jetter et al. 6). Similar to the women who used motherhood as a justification for their political involvement, the women who saw motherhood as part of the revolution politicized the concept of motherhood and the role of the mother. For example, many young mothers made a strong link between caring for children and caring for the future. In the patriarchal society in place in Argentina at the time, women were the main actors in the socialization of children into society, in charge of teaching them values, beliefs, traditions, and behaviors (Samovar 113). Accepting this essential responsibility, activist mothers used their roles to indoctrinate children with the values associated with their political ideologies, such as freedom, equality, and justice. In this way, these mothers were passing their ideals to the next generation in hopes that their children could create a better society in the future.

For some women, having children was viewed as part of the struggle against the junta because they saw it as a duty for women to supply the next generation of people willing to fight against an oppressive government and society. These women knew that imprisonment or death was possible, and very likely, for many of the people, men and women, working to oppose the government, so they were, in essence, creating a future population that would continue to oppose the military junta. They were not only teaching their children the qualities of freedom, equality, and revolution, but they were

providing the physical bodies. Although on the surface this attitude seems somewhat pessimistic because it suggests, one, that many people would die at the hands of the junta and, two, that an oppressive government would still be in place by the time their children become young adults, Argentina had been experiencing political turmoil and civil strife for the greater part of the twentieth century, and the need for activism was a reality in the lives of young women and mothers.

The character who illustrates this outlook towards motherhood and political activism is Dolores in Traba's book *Conversación al Sur*. Dolores, one of the two main protagonists of the novel, is a young woman who becomes involved in politics while at the university. She, like many other young activists, has married and become pregnant. It is the revelation of her pregnancy in a conversation with Irene which captures the attitude of the political necessity of having children:

(Irene): I suppose you're pregnant.

The girl turned an intense red and looked at the woman with certain hostility.

(Dolores): Why do you suppose that?

(Irene): Because all the young female revolutionaries that I know are pregnant.

(Dolores): What are we supposed to do! Perhaps we figure there isn't much time.

"At least she didn't say it was to prepare the future troops," she thought (41, my translation).

In this scene, Traba highlights two aspects of the view that motherhood is part of the revolution. One, there is little time for these women because their lives could be cut short at any minute and, two, they are producing the new generation of fighters. The irony with which Irene makes the assumption that Dolores is pregnant and the way in which Dolores angrily responds, suggests that the idea of women having children to supply the next generation of fighters was more of a perception of politically active women than it was an actual practice. Dolores does not want to think of her pregnancy in such detached manner because, for her, the child symbolizes hope for the future, not just a mere replacement. To the outsider, however, these women seem

selfish and irresponsible to be bringing a child into such an unstable and dangerous world.

For the women activists who became mothers, the experience of motherhood transformed them in profound ways by challenging their perceptions of themselves as activists, and narrowing their view of social change from a very general and abstract perspective, to one that realized the effects of activism on individual human beings (Jetter et al. 4). Dolores undergoes a similar transformation. Although she loses her fetus due to the torture and abuse she endures in prison, she nonetheless experiences motherhood. The loss of her child and her motherhood makes her more aware of how political activism affects individual people, specifically the other mothers she knows. Committed to political change, Dolores seems almost immune to tragedy and death. Irene even questions, “Does she no longer identify life with happiness and death with unbearable, abusive misfortune?” (Traba 33, my translation). The experience of losing her baby, however, helps Dolores to see how political struggle impacts people’s individual lives. She realizes that in the attempt to bring about some greater social good, the real people who suffer are the mothers who lose their children — herself, whose torture leads to miscarriage and permanent internal damage; her mother, whom she has alienated to the point that they no longer have any type of real relationship; Irene, who hides herself away in her house, waiting for any news of her own son and grandchild in Chile; and Elena, who is driven to become one of the “madwomen” of the Plaza de Mayo. For Dolores and other women, motherhood transforms politics into a very real and very personal issue.

Motherhood as a Burden

The previous examples of the relationship between mothers and political participation establish the sentiment that motherhood was an essential element of activism for the women involved in politics during Argentina’s Dirty War. This positive attitude was not, however, common to all women. Some women viewed motherhood as a burden and an obstacle to effectively fighting against the government. Pregnancy and children were sometimes perceived to slow women down and create an emotional bond that would leave them physically and mentally vulnerable. Furthering their political objectives took

precedence in the lives of these women, and they replaced the possibility of identifying themselves as mothers for identities as activists wholly dedicated to the cause. Revolutionary ideals became a substitute for motherhood as a means of dignity and social value (Treacy 138).

Traba's character Victoria in *Conversación al Sur* embodies this attitude towards motherhood and politics. The most important episode in understanding Victoria's outlook on motherhood is when she goes to Andrés, one of the resistance leaders, and asks him two questions; one, if he would let her join the movement, and, two, if he could help her find a doctor to get an abortion. She says to him, "I'm pregnant and I can no longer have this child" (108, my translation). It is important to note, and is brought up later by Andrés, that Victoria says that she can *no longer* have a baby now that she wants to become involved in the resistance movement. When Victoria takes the place of Andrés as one of the leaders of the rebellion in Buenos Aires and is consumed with organizing groups of activists and planning attacks on the government, the reasoning behind her decision becomes more apparent. Dolores observes that, "the truth is that since [Victoria] replaced Andrés as the leader of the group, her accuracy, prudence and efficacy were like clockwork...she knew very well what to do and acted as the double of Andrés" (120, my translation). Victoria has taken on a role traditionally held by men and in order to be taken seriously she has to work with clockwork precision, efficiency and precaution. There is no room for error caused by emotion such as she experiences earlier when seeking an abortion. Traba writes, "She seemed to be making an enormous effort to control her tears...He eyes were half opened. 'If they open,' Andrés thought, 'the tears will begin to drain'" (109, my translation). Motherhood is the cause of this emotional response, which Victoria sees as a point of weakness in her struggle against military oppression.

Victoria's situation highlights two main issues associated with the view that motherhood is a burden when it comes to political participation. The first, and most obvious, is the idea that motherhood makes women emotionally vulnerable. In her article "New Thoughts on the "Oldest Vocation," Ellen Ross points out that "the love and care of children is, for everyone, an open invitation not only to

unending hard work but also to trouble and sorrow, if not usually to tragedy (398). As a militant activist, Victoria must focus on political endeavors and her responsibilities to the people she is leading. She has no time for caring for and worrying about children as well. Also, in a world where tragedy is already an ever-present part of the lives of political activists, there is no need to add more tragedy and sorrow by opening up the possibility of losing a child. The second issue stems from the idea that politically active women take on a new role as public players, outside the framework of traditional feminine activity. Since the public sphere had been traditionally dominated by men, some of the women who found themselves in this new arena tried to reject conventional images of women, including motherhood. Victoria rejects motherhood in part because she fears becoming her own mother. She experiences the horror of repeating what the patriarchal culture of Argentina had determined to be women's position in society (Criado 2). Victoria has witnessed how her own mother was subjugated by her father to the point that she could not even protect her daughter for fear of overstepping her bounds as his wife. Victoria fears becoming confined by marriage and motherhood as her mother is. She does not want to perpetuate the image of women as inherently tied to motherhood and the care for the family and home. Instead she wants to promote the view of women as being capable of participating and leading in the public and political spheres. In order to distance themselves from the traditional roles, women such as Victoria adopted more masculine traits and removed themselves from female traditions, including the tradition of motherhood.

Conclusion

Through this analysis of critical and literary works written about the Dirty War in Argentina from 1976-1983, we have seen how the concept of motherhood was reshaped by the social and economic situation created by the military dictatorship of the Proceso. Three main aspects of the relationship between motherhood and political action have become evident from a study of the novels *El Fin de la Historia*, *Conversación al Sur*, and *The Little School*. First, we have seen how characters like Alicia, Elena, and Leonora use their motherhood to justify their involvement with political resistance groups. Fighting

against the junta on behalf of their children, they view their political activism as an extension of their responsibilities as “good” mothers. Other characters, such as Dolores in *Conversación al Sur*, view motherhood as an integral part of revolution. These women perceive motherhood as a way to produce, physically and ideologically, the next generation of revolutionaries. Other female characters choose to reject motherhood. In *Conversación al Sur*, Victoria proves herself a capable leader, in part by distancing herself from the patriarchal image of woman as mother.

Regardless of their situation, age, social status, or political ideology, the women in these novels seek a balance between motherhood and political action. Their stories represent the lives of real women in Argentina during the Proceso who found their motherhood at the center of their struggle as well. The movement of motherhood out of the private sphere and into the public sphere made it possible for women to gain recognition and even some power in politics. Argentina’s las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo attracted national and international attention, not only to the atrocities in Argentina, but to the question of human rights around the world. Women who had been silent victims of dictatorships were inspired by las Madres and found the motivation they needed to become more politically active and aware. Unfortunately, however, because of the social norms placed on women, and psychological pain associated with losing a child at the hands of the Proceso, many women have chosen to remain silent about their experiences. Three aspects of motherhood and political action during the military junta were studied for this analysis, but there will be new viewpoints and perceptions of motherhood to analyze and discuss as more women come forward with their own memories and accounts of their struggles as mothers during Argentina’s Proceso.

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