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**LAS MADRES DE LA PLAZA DE MAYO AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF
RESISTANCE**

by

STEPHANIE ROSS, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Institute of Political Economy

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

August 21, 1995

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"LAS MADRES DE LA PLAZA DE MAYO
AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RESISTANCE"

submitted by Stephanie A. Ross, B.A.Hons.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Thesis Supervisor

Director, Institute of Political Economy

Carleton University
14 September 1995

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the Left has undergone a series of debates over the appropriate agents and strategies for resistance in the late 20th century. These debates have left in their wake a level of theoretical and political uncertainty which has undermined the ability of scholars and activists to understand and intervene in the world. This thesis examines the practices of an actual project of resistance--Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo--in order to elucidate the issues raised by this debate. Through an analysis of Las Madres and the economic, political and cultural context of Argentina, this thesis endeavours to elaborate our understanding of the formation of identity and consciousness and the building of effective counterhegemonic movements, with particular attention to the opportunities and constraints presented by late 20th century capitalism, in order to assess the gaps in current theoretical and political knowledge on the Left.

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Introduction: Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo and the Political Economy of Resistance

The struggle of Argentinian women against multiple forms of oppression took a novel turn in the late 1970s, when the conditions of military dictatorship abruptly transformed the political landscape and opened the way for the development of new forms of resistance. Of particular international acclaim have been the efforts of Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, an organization of women who were moved to political action due to the disappearances of their children into the enormous yet clandestine repressive apparatus set up by the euphemistically-titled *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*, or the *Proceso*. Largely, Las Madres were women not previously politically active, nor were they initially intending to challenge the state as an institution and the traditional gender roles that had defined them primarily as mothers and wives. Instead, the basis of their politicization was precisely their maternal role, and the initial goal of the organization was to seek and protect their missing children. In the course of this search, Las Madres came face to face with the repressive apparatus of the state and began to challenge the legality of state terror and prevailing notions of national security, order, and peace. Furthermore, the struggle of mothers in the public sphere was a symbolic and material rejection of the traditional sexual division of labour which had constructed women as non-political and incapable of organizing effective resistance. Therefore, the effects of Las Madres' struggle were present not only at the level of discourse about state politics but also at the level of everyday practices of domination in the sphere of gender politics. The efforts of women had an impact not only on the world around them, but also upon their own self-consciousness as political agents capable of making change.

The perseverance and intransigence of these women in the face of violent reprisals, an almost absolute lack of domestic institutional support and solidarity, and the growing culture of fear wrought by the repression in Argentina commanded the attention of Western

activists and intellectuals. Without a doubt, Las Madres resisted the dictatorship at a time when the voices of most liberals and leftists in Argentina were drowned in the din of calls for order and national security. When civil society reawakened in the final days of the junta, Las Madres were able to form the ethical vanguard in the swelling movement for (re)democratization, challenging not only the specific actions of the regime, but also the organizing principles of Argentine political, economic and social life. Their calls for *aparición con vida*¹ of the *desaparecidos*² represented not a naive hope that their children were still alive, but an insistence upon the importance of due process, the rule of law, a full accounting of crimes committed by the state, and the prosecution of those responsible for these crimes as integral prerequisites for the (re)establishment of democracy in Argentina. Moreover, their insertion of ethical values into political discourse also challenged prevailing notions of democracy as simply elections, and called for a radical rethinking of the concept. As such, the project of Las Madres was deemed as more than a movement insisting upon universal respect for human rights: their activities also challenged prevailing modes of socio-political life. Las Madres were, in these respects, revolutionary in their vision.

However, despite the initial success of Las Madres in the struggle against dictatorship, the movement--like other Latin American women's movements--ironically found the transition to democratic politics much more difficult. As the space for political activity reopened, and the competition for power and advantage vis-à-vis the state recommenced, Las Madres found their demands for a true accounting of the fate of their children and a bringing to justice of those responsible increasingly ignored by political representatives. The need for pragmatism and compromise in democratic politics--particularly in the face of a still-powerful military and of domestic and international capital--

¹Literally, 'reappearance alive'.

² 'disappeared ones'

was in direct contradiction with the absolute values of Truth, Justice, and Life which formed the basis of Las Madres' political discourse. Subsequently, in the face of a government required to make peace with those political and economic sectors that had engineered and implemented the *Proceso*, Las Madres became increasingly disillusioned with the new 'democratic' government and continued their intransigence. Argentinians, moreover, were generally exhausted and more than anxious to initiate a process of forgetting that so often characterizes the time after traumatic experiences, and therefore increasingly withdrew their support from Las Madres in an attempt to "get on with life". By 1993, it became clear during my visit to Argentina that Las Madres were evoking reactions of sorrow, pity, and often contempt as they seem to symbolize that aspect of the Argentine conscience that will not forget, that will not release the pain of past tragedy, that will not let anyone else forget. They remind Argentinians of a time of terror and self-mutilation, of widespread silence and complicity, and an experience of aborted justice under democracy.

Why is it salient that we come to understand the decline of the ability of Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, a movement for democratization, no less, to mount effective resistance during a period of democratic transition? This thesis argues that Las Madres as a case study raises a series of important political, theoretical and epistemological questions. The political level is naturally related to discerning the specific aspects of resistance in Argentina. It is intrinsically important to identify the manner in which collective identities in Argentina come to be constituted and politically relevant in certain historical moments, as well as the particular opportunities and constraints which present themselves in terms of political economy, culture and discourse. This aspect of the inquiry is deeply political in that it seeks to develop enhanced understandings of the means and problems of mounting resistance in the Argentine context for the purpose of making struggle more effective. However, the pertinence of these issues is much broader, insofar as we need to understand

the manner in which 'non-traditional'³ social forces in general come to be politically relevant in certain historical moments, the extent to which these movements are effectively transforming the political terrain, either at the local/personal/interpersonal level or at the macro level of national political and economic relations, and the conditions under which social movements can be sustained. Insofar as 'new' social movements have proliferated rapidly in the last 25 years, and those who theorize the movements claim that they present a more radical challenge to established power relations than did the organized labour movement, it is important to understand whether, when and how movements like Las Madres are sustainable and effective, or ephemeral and marginal, particularly in the context of internationalized production and political relations between states.

Secondly, an examination of the case of Las Madres is useful in the theoretical attempt to discern the strengths and weaknesses in prevailing accounts of resistance be they Marxist, post-Marxist or feminist--particularly when applied to the activism of women in the 'Third World'. In the context of theoretical debates about the appropriate agents and methods of social change, the example of Las Madres as a "new" or "contemporary" social movement provides some interesting challenges. The fact that an ostensibly non-class, non-feminist social force such as Las Madres came to lead the resistance against a dictatorship which was in many respects the manifestation of the war between classes and which used a discourse of traditional gender roles to justify its reorganization of society is

³ There is some debate over the way in which social forces such as Las Madres should be denominated. There is extensive discussion over the opposition 'old' versus 'new' social movements ('traditional' and 'non-traditional' fall within that which is connoted by the previous terms), although the claim of novelty is somewhat unsatisfactory, as there are many continuities with working-class organizing that we can point to. In general, however, I do take the term 'new social movements' to indicate those movements who do not self-identify primarily as 'labour' movements, organized around the workplace and represented by 'labour' parties. This does not mean, however, that these movements are not 'working-class', an issue which will be addressed in Chapter 2. Ultimately, while this thesis does not specifically focus on the contours of the novelty/continuity debate, it should become apparent that I do attempt to explore the constitution of 'new' political identities and strategies as well as assess their effectiveness in the context of capitalist authoritarianism and capitalist democracy, respectively.

counter to what either Marxism or feminism would consider an appropriate and effective political response. The relative (albeit short lived) success of Las Madres therefore raises questions about the capacity of Marxist or feminist theory to 'predict' and understand the ways in which individuals become variously constituted as members of collective identities, as well as to assess what constitutes an appropriate political struggle in any specific historical moment.

For example, those operating within the classical Marxist tradition have been sceptical of the ability of non-class actors such as Las Madres to mount effective resistance against large-scale processes of oppression, repression, and exploitation. In particular, critics from within Argentina have charged that the failure of Las Madres to politicize their claims based on the political/class allegiances of their children constitutes not only a betrayal of their memory as political activists, but also has diluted the struggle against capitalist domination, the 'real' culprit behind the authoritarian *Proceso*. While the links between the regime and domestic and international capital are undeniable and must be analyzed, the argument that alternative forms of praxis cannot challenge the (authoritarian) state betrays a rigid notion of an authentic politics that fails to look for new and previously unexplored spaces for resistance which can be, and in fact have been, extremely destabilizing of oppressive regimes. In the case of Argentina, where the space and 'personnel' for working-class struggle was violently reduced during the experience of authoritarian rule, there was little choice but to develop alternative methods of struggle using previously apolitical (and therefore, in the minds of the authorities, 'non-threatening') actors. The failure of Marxist analysis is thus two-fold in this situation: not only has it inadequately valued the role of Las Madres (and perhaps vastly overvalued the efforts of the organized working class) in the defeat of the regime, its practitioners were reluctant to join ranks with Las Madres during the dictatorship, perhaps lengthening the struggle needlessly.

However, some feminist analyses of Las Madres have also not been overly supportive, and have generally focussed on the 'regressive' nature of women organizing around the roles ascribed to them by patriarchy--as mother, wife, and emotional centre of the household. Both within and without Argentina, feminists have been reluctant to support the politics of what is called "*movimientos de mujeres*" ⁴ due to their purported acceptance and reproduction of the parameters of women's traditionally assigned roles as nurturer and provider of the physical and emotional needs of the family. This position contrasts with the views of other feminists who attempt to theorize the political implications of the caring and nurturing work that women do. This view is especially found in feminist work on militarism and peace, which links women's "ethic of care" developed through the experience of childbirth and child rearing--whether learned or essential--to the foundation of a peaceful and just society (Ruddick, 1989; Bouvard, 1994: 182). Other feminists are wary of such a position as it risks essentializing and biologizing what they consider to be the socially ascribed characteristics of women (Tong, 1989: 85; Feijoó, 1989: 88). What is clear in examining this debate is that it tends to be intensely polarized.

This polarization is evident in the Latin American women's movement more generally, as the tense character of debate between "*feministas*" and "*mujeres*" at the feminist Encuentro ⁵ in Taxco, Mexico in 1987 reveals. At this conference, the

⁴ Literally, "women's movements", also referred to as *movimientos femeninos*, or "feminine movements". These terms are used to describe working-class women's organizations created as collective responses to economic crises and human rights abuses. Taking place at the neighbourhood level, these movements tend to be organized around the socially ascribed responsibilities of women, which has led feminists in Latin America to question their progressive or transformative potential, arguing that these kinds of activities reproduce the sexual division of labour and do not criticize the traditional material/ideological oppression of women. See Sternbach et al, 1992: 211-214 for a discussion; see also Vargas, 1992 for the divisions within the Latin American feminist/women's movement.

⁵ Latin American women have been holding continental feminist conferences or Encuentros since 1981 in an attempt to create international links between women, "to exchange experiences and opinions, identify problems and evaluate different practices, as well as plan tasks and projects for the future" (Sternbach et. al., 1992: 214). Each of the six Encuentros held to date have reflected the evolving nature and growing diversity of Latin American women's movements, and the conferences have generally been marked by heated

contradictions arising from the growth of the Latin American women's movement--as it grew in sheer numbers it also became much more diverse and complex--were expressed in terms of a desire to reorient the women's movement to "gender-specific" issues as understood by a small group of activists.

Perhaps the most extreme example of all the attempts at Taxco to impose a restricted proprietary stance over the "true" definition of feminism was the small group of feminists who spent the entire Encuentro, divorced from the entire event, in a closed room drafting a statement on the state of "the movement" that was delivered at the final plenary session. The fact that they had not really participated in the Encuentro but offered critiques of it flared some tempers. In other instances, some *históricas*⁶ argued that merely organizing other women irrespective of issue content did not constitute feminist practice. They insisted that the movement's energies should not be consumed by the *mujeres'* efforts to secure running water or adequate sewage for working-class women, for instance. Instead, feminism must promote an alternative "women's culture" and concern itself with those issues that community groups and progressive parties are never going to address--such as abortion, domestic violence, and sexual and reproductive freedom. Only women prioritizing these gender-specific issues and concerns could be considered "true" feminists (Sternbach et. al., 1992: 230).

Furthermore, Maxine Molyneux's distinction between organizing around women's practical interests versus strategic interests (while analytically useful for clarifying the differences between those activities which aim at coping most effectively within the given gendered division of labour, on the one hand, and those efforts which challenge that division, on the other) has been used politically to demote the struggle of women like Las Madres as less progressive (Molyneux, 1985: 236-7). This use of what is wryly referred to as the "*feministómetro*"⁷ to measure and compare various forms of women's struggles has at its base universalist assumptions regarding the appropriate issues around which women should organize, the social roles women should reject, and the strategies they should adopt, without reference to the social, political, economic and cultural context

debates over defining "feminist" political issues and practices.

⁶ veteran feminists (Sternbach et. al., 1992: 225)

⁷ Literally, "feminist yardstick"; see Sternbach et.al., 1992: 219, 226.

within which women find themselves. Such narrow, ahistorical, acultural evaluation is damaging, as it diminishes the possibilities for political alliances between women by creating seemingly unbridgeable gaps and hierarchies of struggle. This position also ignores the idea that consciousness is a process of growth and cumulation. As Norma Stoltz Chinchilla points out, while women's early participation in political struggles "was often derived from an attempt to fulfill [sic], rather than subvert, the traditional gender division of labour"--Las Madres being a case in point--I will attempt to trace the process by which "the experiences women gained in the process often created fertile ground for links between a gender-specific consciousness..., feminist consciousness..., and social consciousness (consciousness of class, social sector, nation, etc)" (Chinchilla, 1992: 41). Most importantly, the delineation by feminists of what is appropriate feminist struggle reproduces unequal relations of power/knowledge, a process which is ultimately alienating, disempowering, and anathema to the stated ethics of feminist movement.

However, the fact that Las Madres did eventually decline in terms of their political effectiveness at the level of national politics brings post-Marxist theory and praxis into question as well. Therefore, with the difficulties of Marxism and feminism in mind, one must also be cautious not to relinquish critique of new forms of resistance altogether, as many working within the post-Marxist framework have done. While post-Marxists have argued for an appreciation of the revolutionary nature of non-class struggles like that of Las Madres as well as the search for new political spaces and strategies, their analyses have often been overly sanguine. Instead of rejecting the universalist notion of the inherent progressiveness of working-class struggle in its entirety, post-Marxists often reject only the 'working class', and insert non-class identity or struggle. While this is a bit of a caricature, it can be legitimately asserted that post-Marxist evaluations of new social movements have been particularly optimistic, with many romanticizing the movements for their dedication to decentralization of power, internal direct democracy, spontaneous acts of resistance, and

submergence in every-day life, as well as inadequately analyzing the specificities of the relations between the state, civil society and capital in both Western and non-Western contexts. The post-Marxist approach is therefore analytically flawed like those previously discussed. Unfortunately, it is not the case that 'new' social movements are always revolutionary, always democratic, always progressive. Furthermore, not all social movements look and act the same, nor do they face the same range of constraints and opportunities for organizing. And finally, just like working-class organizations, not all social movements are ultimately effective. This is a caveat of particular importance when examining movements like Las Madres who are operating in a dependent capitalist context. In sum, and with reference to each of Marxism, feminism and post-Marxism, matters of 'appropriate' actors and modes of struggle are issues to be determined by concrete analysis, not theoretical fiat.

One must ultimately ask whether or not the form of resistance mounted by new social movements today is as inadequate as more traditional forms of struggle. The theoretical question which must be answered is whether or not the problem of the (in)effectiveness of Las Madres lies in 1) the specificities of the movement itself 2) the status of their form of resistance as a "new social movement", or 3) the structural limitations of political economic relations of power at the national/international level. I will argue here that there are important explanations to be found at each of these three levels, and that detailed historical analysis is the key to discerning these explanations. In this sense, what I seek to develop in this thesis is an understanding of resistance that pays attention to the specific effects of a changing international political economy on particular social formations. This analysis will concretely assess actors, spaces, and strategies of resistance according to context as well as theory, without predetermining the appropriate modes of (women's) struggle.

Lastly, I want to argue that the gaps in our understanding of resistance stem in part

from an epistemological stance which uses the Western context to generate falsely universal statements in order to give an ontological account of the relevant structures/processes of oppression, and which subsequently delineates the appropriate actors, strategies, discourses and goals necessary for 'true' revolutionary praxis. The universalism of these approaches renders them less effective in the quest to understand more fully resistance in both Western and Southern contexts. This has the political effect of closing our eyes to strategic possibilities and delegitimizing the concrete experiences of those engaged in unorthodox forms of struggle. Therefore, in order to overcome the theoretical deficiencies of the above, I will employ in this work a historicist understanding of knowledge. That is to say, I wish to retain a view of knowledge as bounded in time and space, both by the position of the researcher and by the intersubjectivity prevailing in particular historical moments. This epistemological stance is further informed by both neo-Gramscian and post-colonial feminist approaches to knowledge and theory construction.

Following international relations theorist Robert Cox, the neo-Gramscian approach highlights the historicity of knowledge and the use of knowledge to promote political and social change. Cox's familiar nostrum, that "*theory is always for someone and for some purpose*", emphasizes the notion that knowledge is not an objective entity that stands outside of history or political projects (Cox, 1986: 207). The importance of holding such a perspective on the production of knowledge is that it leads us to question the purposes of knowledge. Therefore, a neo-Gramscian perspective on knowledge has as its principal concern the strategic identification of the possibilities for emancipatory action. This project is quite clearly within the tradition of critical/neo-Gramscian theory, as it seeks not only to understand the resistance of Las Madres, but to understand in order to identify the lessons of their project for the possibilities for resistance in general.

The post-colonial feminist approach to questions of knowing also emphasizes the historically bounded nature of theory, but highlights the Western bias present in the theory,

epistemology, and methodology of Marxist, post-Marxist and feminist narratives. A post-colonial feminist perspective will serve to indicate the precariousness of giving accounts of the 'third world woman' (Mohanty, 1991b: 53) from a Western standpoint, and will aim towards a politicization of research based on the political bonds of solidarity and identification rather than the largely constructed bonds of 'sisterhood' based on sameness, identity and biological essence.

In order to address these questions, I will provide in Chapter 1 an exposition of my epistemological and political outlook, so as to situate my account within prevailing academic and feminist modes of knowing in the West. Moreover, I will draw insights from post-colonial feminism and neo-Gramscian theories of knowledge in an attempt to strike a delicate balance between paying attention to subjectivity when giving accounts of agency and social contexts in which one does not participate on the one hand, and preserving the ability to give accounts at all on the Other. This epistemological stance is particularly important to the study of Argentinian women as it addresses the forceful critiques which point to the theoretically and politically damaging effects of Eurocentrism in Western intellectual thought. It has been argued that radical traditions such as feminism and Marxism are not exempt from these critiques, and as such, any sincere attempt to deal intellectually and politically with the struggle against oppressive relations of power in general must have a built-in capacity for self-critique which openly challenges one's own contributions to oppression. I hope to achieve this by exploring the Western intellectual construction of "Others"--in particular, the "third world woman"--through discursive means, and elucidating the connection between these discourses and the maintenance of material power relations between the West and the rest of the world. I will then argue that in order to challenge effectively the material power that such discursive practices bestow upon the Western intellectual and the political economy which surrounds her, we must pursue the active politicization of research in a politics of identification. The contradiction

between my economic and political location in the global political economy and my political commitment to the struggles of those that have been constructed as 'Others' provides a fruitful nexus for research, self-critique and the development of more effective forms of resistance. This research therefore emphasizes the epistemological importance of *political alliances* between individuals and groups who have a common--though not identical--experience of oppression. This identification with the 'object' of inquiry does not absolve me of those ways in which I participate in their oppression; it does, however, open up the space for the dialogue over prejudgements and the identification of spaces for resistance in one's own social context. In other words, "it is not color or sex which constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather, it is the way we think about race, class, and gender--the political links we choose to make among and between struggles" (Mohanty, 1991a: 4).

In Chapter 2, I will elaborate the prevailing accounts of resistance and praxis as articulated by Marxist and post-Marxist theoretical perspectives. I will discuss in this chapter the accounts of the field of political action, as well as the conceptions of agency, strategy and goals of 'adequate' political struggle of each intellectual framework and their respective interpretations and evaluations of Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo as a project of resistance. The discussion will show that each perspective has significant failings--as have been briefly mentioned above--which compromise both the ability to assess the successes and failures of Las Madres as well as the possibility of articulating effective alternative praxis for resistance. With these critiques in mind, I will seek to elaborate a political economy perspective with the following characteristics:

- that the formation of political subjects and collective action is a process that must be investigated rather than assumed. I will therefore accept the idea that people are situated in multiple relations of power, and that the decision to identify and organize around a particular relation is the result of a complex interaction of structure and active intervention. In other words, it is important to examine the ways in which actors construct common self-

understandings, and the manner in which actors perceive, evaluate and determine the possibilities for political intervention in their environment. I will draw on both Marxist and post-Marxist theorizations of identity construction, and will hold that while it is not possible for persons to be entirely 'discursively constructed' because they do experience specific material relations of power, it is also not possible to pre-determine the particular identities and meanings that people will give to these concrete experiences.

· that it is possible and important to discuss the material relations of power, or structure. In other words, it is possible to point to relations of power, historically constructed though they may be, which shape, constrain, determine or provide opportunities for collective action. As such, I do not advocate a notion of structure as monolith, but of a set of historically changing power relations that have important impacts on people's lives, the way they interpret their experiences, and the way they can act to transform these relations. In other words, material relations of power are important, but are not omnipotent, and the way people come to understand and respond to structures involves a complex interaction of everyday practices, ideas, and institutions. Resistance, in this definition of structure, always exists, in that people transform and adapt dominant ideas, or respond to the exercise of power, in ways not always intended by power-holders. While it is not the case that these resistances lead automatically to the overthrow of power relationships, they are crucial in that it is out of these practices and understandings that larger projects of resistance must be constructed.

I will then examine the political economy of Argentina during the period of 1976-1989 in Chapter 3, with some reference to the historical processes which established the actors and institutions crucial to this period. In particular, I will offer discussion of the growth of classes and their relation to particular modes of economic development, the various faces of class conflict and the cultural context for the development of 'non-class' actors--particularly women. Furthermore, I will elaborate the political, economic and

cultural environment that characterized the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* and the transition to democracy, in order to elucidate the material and discursive opportunities for, and barriers to, the resistance of Las Madres. In this chapter, I therefore aim at retaining the analysis of structures and relations of oppression that a more materialist political economy perspective offers, an analysis which is often absent in post-Marxist accounts of social movements. At the same time, I will also lay the foundation for discussing those political spaces and identities which were developed and utilized by Las Madres during the *Proceso*.

In Chapter 4, I will then offer an analysis of the genesis and nature of Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. The origins and evolution of the movement will be explored, with particular attention to the strategies and discourse of Las Madres during the period of dictatorship (1976-1983). In this chapter I will examine the way in which women came to organize around a traditional feminine identity--motherhood--and how they subsequently politicized that identity and entered male political spaces in order to achieve the concrete political end of retrieving their children. In this sense, we can see very concretely how the process of identity (trans)formation can be both personally empowering and politically effective, as discussed by post-Marxists. Moreover, we can also see how the decision to organize around non-class identities and to pursue non-traditional tactics of information distribution both domestically and internationally, new kinds of symbolic signification, and activity in a multiplicity of spaces both public and private, was strategically important in a context of overt class war and violent economic restructuring. The articulation of demands in non-class terms allowed Las Madres initially to escape the wrath of the junta, but also to provide the ideological cement for the multi-class anti-dictatorship movement. Therefore, in Chapter 4 I will draw out the ways in which the post-Marxist paradigm (from Chapter 2) and post-colonial feminist insights (from Chapter 1) are relevant in the explication of the first seven years of Las Madres' movement.

I will address the contradictions faced by Las Madres during the transition to democracy (1983-1989) in Chapter 5. My focus here will be on the variable effectiveness of the discursive and material practices in this very different period, with the aim of elucidating why Las Madres were incapable of maintaining the vigour and effectiveness of their movement in the transition to democratic rule in the latter period. Here, the debates between Marxism and post-Marxism become relevant, as we begin to see the importance of structural limitations and the inability of discursive struggle to be effective in all moments. As we investigate the process of redemocratization, the necessity of coping with the international economy, and the attempt to engage in an exercise of collective memory/amnesia (depending upon one's stand in the debate), we will increasingly see how the failure to understand fully the nature of structural power in Argentina and to make strategic alliances with other political actors--especially the working class--led to the 'withering away' of Las Madres. To a great extent, we can see the continuing relevance of Marxist theories of capitalism, of working-class agency as being strategically situated to confront capital, and of the importance of material relations in this investigation of the 5-year transition to democracy.

In sum, in this project I am attempting to reread a relatively well-documented process of the development of a new collective identity. However, I have endeavoured to make this rereading theoretical rather than documentary--I want to find within the more descriptive and journalistic accounts of Las Madres the clues to understanding how individuals come to see themselves as part of a collective identity with the ability to intervene in the processes which shape their lives. If one is interested in what motivates people to political action, one must understand these processes--what is common to all, and what is specific to social formations and even individuals. Moreover, in this discussion of Las Madres, I want to shed light on third world women's movements more generally, with a view to understanding the limitations faced by these movements in the context in domestic

class and gender relations. Finally, I want to contribute to the current theoretical debate over how we should understand and frame resistance. In this sense, the case of Las Madres provides a way to evaluate current theoretical understandings of resistance and to discern how we can build better theory.

Chapter 1: Western Intellectual Practice: Ideas, Power and the Material World

In this chapter, I want to set the stage--epistemologically speaking--for the ontological debates about the praxis of resistance to be examined in Chapter 2, as well as the discussion of Las Madres as a novel form of personal and political practice in Chapter 4. Here, the focus is on debates over knowledge, and specifically on the political implications of universalist forms of knowledge that have emerged from the Enlightenment. Although I will briefly discuss this universalist tendency in Marxist epistemology here, I want to reserve a more extended discussion of the ontological assumptions and validity of Marxist theory for Chapter 2, where it is presented in conflict with the post-Marxist paradigm. The discussions in this chapter will form the background for those debates. What I would like to do here is focus on feminist debates about knowledge and draw out their implications for how we look at apparently 'non-feminist' women's movements like Las Madres. Although this discussion could easily be treated in Chapter 2, I feel that the debates over theoretical and epistemological universalism are best developed in the feminist paradigm, and that we can most readily access feminist discussions of movements like Las Madres through an epistemological lens.

The post-colonial critique has made the important point that revolutionary theory and politics emergent from the West in the form of Marxism and feminism are situated within a larger set of epistemological assumptions that form the foundations of Enlightenment thinking, and as such must be subject to the same scrutiny as more established modes of inquiry such as positivist science. In light of these criticism, this chapter will endeavour to develop an epistemological stance which attempts to preserve the powerful aspects of Marxist and feminist approaches (with a focus on the latter), while at the same drawing insights from post-colonial feminist positions which seek to overcome the more universalizing and ethnocentric aspects of Western intellectual practice. Therefore,

we will begin with a discussion of the general characteristics of Enlightenment thought, and then examine the traces of these modes of knowing in the Marxist and feminist paradigms. I will then provide a brief examination of Marxist epistemological strategies which both repudiate and retain themes of the Enlightenment. In this vein, Marxism entails the rejection of the subject-object separation, the repudiation of the universal pretensions of bourgeois-liberal ideology and the insistence on the historical and material situatedness of ideology and knowledge in general; however, it also retains a sense of history as governed by laws which unify its meaning as well as a belief in inevitable progress. From this we move on to a more extensive discussion of feminist epistemological debates. Feminists have undermined notions of implicitly male subjectivity and the idea that knowledge is disembodied and unrelated to the situatedness of the subject, and have appreciated the validity of experiential forms of knowledge. However, there remains a way in which Western feminism is predicated upon a particular notion of Woman which does not recognize the diversity of women's experiences and situations, and makes invisible the multiple and contradictory nature of subjectivity. Ultimately, it will become clear that neither of these paradigms are homogenous and unified, nor are they irremediable; in fact, both Marxism and feminism contain important epistemological strands which would allow them to deal with the substance of the post-colonial critique. Therefore, this chapter will end by attempting to delineate the connections between ideas, power and the material with insights from each of these epistemological trajectories.

In general, the Enlightenment can be seen as a broad intellectual effort "to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic" (Habermas, 1983: 9 in Harvey, 1989: 12), by which "the universal, eternal, and the immutable qualities of all humanity [would] be revealed" and the end of which was "to use the accumulation of knowledge generated by many individuals working freely and creatively for the pursuit of human emancipation and the enrichment of daily life" (Harvey,

1989: 12). As a social and political/ideological project, the Enlightenment promoted a view of human history and society that was inherently progressive and predicated upon the existence of universals true across time, space and culture, a subject which was rational, autonomous, unified, and (implicitly) male, and a view of science as the mode through which all knowledge could be demystified and harnessed for the betterment and eventual liberation of mankind [sic] from all want and domination (Harvey, 1989: 12).

The Enlightenment has always had its critics (Harvey, 1989: 15), but none so vehement and influential as those which have emerged in the last 50 years. At the forefront of the most recent round of criticism are the postmodernists and the post-colonial/anti-racist critics and their rejection of the Western intellectual practice of theoretical and methodological universalism. These theorists challenge not only established classist, racist and patriarchal knowledge, but also Marxist and feminist theory and practice, which, they argue, continue to rest upon universalist assumptions about the sources of oppression and strategies for emancipation. Along with the Enlightenment assumptions of objectivity and subject-object separation, universalism as an epistemological stance leads to the notion that scientific statements or accounts which are valid for all times, places and cultures can be made, and that the aim of science is in fact to produce such universal knowledge. Because in Enlightenment thought the specificities of subjectivity--class, gender, race/ethnicity, etc--are assumed to have no impact on the knowledge produced from observation and theorization, universal knowledge is possible and desirable. However, post-modern and post-colonial theorists (among others) have forwarded the position that knowledge is inherently subjective and infused with relations of power, and therefore one must always ask the epistemological question: for whom is theory created and for what purpose? Who benefits from the adoption of a particular interpretation of reality, and who loses? In light of the political nature of knowledge, then, one must immediately question the validity of universal statements or accounts. The post-modernist critique of

Enlightenment thinking can thus best be summarized with Lyotard's notion of the meta-narrative, referring to the Enlightenment practice of producing large-scale political and intellectual projects which unify the meaning of history and delineate a strategy for the emancipation of all humankind (Harvey, 1989: 12; Barrett, 1992: 205). Therefore, while both Marxism and feminism have offered vehement critiques of the political and social processes that emerged from the implementation of modernity, each has retained a universalist epistemological stance which reproduces unequal power relations in discourse and political practice.

Marx's work does depart somewhat from the most universalizing tendencies of Enlightenment thinking, in that he posits that the subject is historically bounded, and that the material relations of production and power have a direct impact on knowledge. This idea was further developed by Gramsci, who theorized ideology as that socially constructed set of conceptions manifest in all of social life. This is also the terrain on which people come to understand themselves and the field of political possibilities. Importantly, however, ideology of the organic type theorized by Gramsci is tied to the hegemonic project of a class or historic bloc, which works to universalize the particular interests of the dominant class fraction. It is in this basis that Robert Cox writes that "[p]erspectives derive from a position in time and space, specifically social and political time and space" and that "there is no such thing as theory in itself" (Cox, 1986: 207). He cautions us to beware of any theory that represents itself as such, for in that instance "it is the more important to examine it as ideology, and to lay bare its concealed perspective" (Cox, 1986: 207). For Cox, knowledge is not simply a body of descriptive statements or predictive axioms; it is, and properly should be, fundamentally prescriptive, and entails the advocacy of a particular set of social and political arrangements. Cox argues that, as a critical or Marxist theorist, one should use knowledge in order to point out the historical boundedness of the present order, to criticize it, and to envision social and political arrangements that are more just and

equitable. Marxist theory, just as it views knowledge as constructed by human beings, holds that social arrangements are also created and therefore subject to transformation. As such, Cox writes that "[c]ritical theory...does not take institutions and social and power relations for granted but calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in the process of changing" (Cox, 1986: 208). As such, critical theory not only provides a more holistic appraisal of both continuity and change, but also "allows for a normative choice in favor of a social and political order different from the prevailing order" (Cox, 1986: 210).

However, although critical of the dehumanizing and exploitative effects of industrial capitalist society, Marxism is still said to exemplify the main tenets of Enlightenment thought in the following manner. As Harvey points out, Marx "sought to convert utopian thinking...into a materialist science by showing how universal human emancipation might emerge from the class-bound and evidently repressive, though contradictory, logic of capitalist development" (Harvey, 1989: 14-15). While rejecting the arguments of those who predicted the universal benefits of bourgeois capitalism, Marxism (re)produced both an overarching revolutionary project and an historical agent--the working class--to carry it out. This project was universalist in its scope, producing a meta-narrative which objectively identified the appropriate agents and methods of historical change in all social contexts.

It has been argued that the search for scientific laws of history and the belief in historical progress which characterizes much of Marxist thought has not only narrowed the "space for human action and political initiative" (Boggs, 1986: 58), but also diminished the capacity of Marxist theory to account for multiple forms of domination and the resistance of non-class actors. Critics charge that in the Marxist framework, forms of resistance not based upon the mobilization of the working class are deemed non-revolutionary and strategies that do not challenge the state as the political representative of capital are non-

effective (Magnussen and Walker, 1988: 46, 48). Such an automatic, *a priori* dismissal of non-class, non-state forms of resistance becomes an intellectual impediment to those exploring ways of transcending the difficulties that Marxist praxis has encountered and produced world-wide. This reification of agents, structures and political spaces, as well as the determinism, reductionism and universalism implied in this reification, leads the most extreme post-modern critics to claim that "Marxism is irredeemably in thrall to the repressive project of modernity, brutally reducing actual histories to the procrustean 'History' of class struggle or modes of production" (Pinkney in Bottomore, 1991: 383). While I will explore further these charges on the ontological level in Chapter 2, it is important to ask here whether or not this is an adequate representation of Marxist intellectual practice, and if so, whether or not the paradigm is 'irredeemable'.

Equally instructive on the issue of Las Madres are the current debates in feminist circles about knowledge and the way we subsequently define the category "women" and their interests. From its inception, feminism has been concerned with rejecting the (mis)understandings of women's lives and experiences produced by male social science, a rejection which is premised on the notion that the situatedness of the knowing subject matters epistemologically. In other words, feminist epistemology has rejected the objectivism of Enlightenment science and has asserted that one's position in the relations of power--in this case along the gendered relations of power--affects one's assumptions about the world and the way one interprets the nature and interests of the 'objects' of study. We can see from Sandra Harding's discussion that there are multiple feminist responses to positivist social scientific assumptions, ranging from feminist empiricism, to feminist standpointism and feminist postmodernism (Harding, 1986). Although each of these approaches are themselves problematic and contradictory in many respects, each of them affirms the importance of the experience of women as a legitimate source of knowledge about the world. As such, the experience of oppression itself, as the experience of

exploitation by the working class in Marx, becomes a platform for giving a more complete account of the structures of economic, political and social life.

However, as Marnia Lazreg points out in her critique of Western feminist knowledge production about women in the Middle East, "academic feminism has yet to break away from the philosophical and theoretical heritage it has so powerfully questioned... Although it questions traditional [ontological] assumptions, academic feminism has often neglected to investigate its own premises" which continue to fall within the Western intellectual tradition of social scientific inquiry (Lazreg, 1988: 82). Lazreg's explorations demonstrate the failure of Western/academic feminism--like classical Marxism--to challenge, let alone transcend, the dominant social science discourses about the Middle East in general and Middle Eastern women specifically. This analysis of the way in which concepts such as Islam are fetishized and differences among women are essentialized points to a more general problem in the feminist analysis of women in the third world: the prevailing inability to appreciate the specificities of women's lives and the political projects they subsequently choose to pursue.

Western feminism's epistemological positions and political projects have subsequently been challenged as reflecting an unconscious universalism that uses the white Western woman as its frame of reference and which promotes the theoretical and political silencing of difference. The tendency towards universalist modes of theorizing has resulted in the invisibilization of the specificities of women's subject positions in various spaces within the global political economy, the misrepresentation of the realities of women's lives, and the delegitimization of forms of struggle not shaped along the lines of Western feminist movements. The demand to hear and speak from the so-called "woman's voice"--a response to the "male monopoly over accounts of women's lives"--stems from the correct analysis that "virtually no women have had a voice, whatever their race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual alliance, whatever place and period in history they lived" (Lugones and

Spelman, 1983: 573, 574). However, the monistic focus on the suppression of women as women has led to the false conclusion that "whether a woman is rich or poor, Black, brown or white, etc. is irrelevant to what it means to her to be a woman" (Lugones and Spelman, 1983: 574). In this way, despite the critique of universalist male categories that feminism elaborates, to some extent feminist research has remained trapped in the dichotomy man/woman, and has failed to deconstruct adequately the experience of femaleness as refracted through other identities (class, colour, and nationality to name a few) (Harding, 1986: 661; 659). Hand in hand with this invisibilization of the plurality of women's experiences goes the misrepresentation of those women not at the centre of theory construction. The definition of Woman based on the particular experiences of white women had led to the construction of Others, specifically in the form of the "third world Woman" through a process which Chandra Mohanty terms "discursive colonization". Western feminism's totalizing theoretical and political concepts have thus led to the reproduction of racist and imperialist discourses characteristic of the Enlightenment tradition as a whole, with debilitating effects on theorization and the mounting of effective political struggle.

Let us first explore the implications of the invisibilization of the multiple experiences of women. Specifically, the search for the aforementioned "woman's voice" has led Western feminism to make a theoretical leap from the specificities of the lives of *women* to universal proclamations about the state of *Woman*. Such universalizations have led to a "suppression of heterogeneity" (Mohanty, 1991b: 53). "The assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, or contradictions, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy which can be applied universally and cross-culturally" (Mohanty, 1991b: 55). This movement from the specific to the general is the hallmark of the Western scientific enterprise, and is one of the primary epistemological strategies with

which knowledge about the world is produced. Yet Mohanty challenges the validity of generalizations, writing that the "connection between women as historical subjects and the re-presentation of Woman produced by hegemonic discourses is not a relation of direct identity, or a relation of correspondence or simple implication. It is an arbitrary relation set up by particular cultures", a relation which produces false universals (Mohanty, 1991b: 53). In other words, feminist knowledge production occurs within the cultural context of unequal power relations--racism, classism, imperialism and sexism--and the leap from women to Woman is informed by this. Particularly important for this project, Western feminism must be thought of as situated within "the context of a world system dominated by the West" (Mohanty, 1991b: 53), a position which indicates a relation between the larger ethnocentric discourse in Western scholarship on the "third world" and Western feminism's discourse on "third world woman".¹ The material relations of power amongst women has led to feminist theorizing which, instead of fully containing the specificities and variety of women's lives, arises "out of the voices, the experiences, of a handful of women, and if other women's voices do not sing in harmony with the theory, they are not counted as women's voices--rather, they are the voices of the woman as Hispana, Black, Jew, etc." (Lugones and Spelman, 1983: 575). In the prevailing relations of power, those who have been doing the counting are white, bourgeois Western women, and thus the concept of Woman has come to represent the specific experiences of white, bourgeois, Western women.

The illusion of the unitary category of Woman has been cemented by the notion that

¹ It is the practice of naming Argentine women 'third world women' that interests us here. Specifically, while Argentines generally tend to self-identify as "European" rather than "third world", "South American" or "underdeveloped", given the character of the country as a "white settler colony", Western theory and theorists do name Argentina as 'third world'. In other words, this project is interested in (implicitly at least) contrasting how Argentine women such as Las Madres think of themselves and are thought of by Westerners, as well as attempting to challenge the generality of the association of Argentine women with 'third world women' through a detailed reading of the specificity of their lives.

women *qua* women have an automatic basis for 'sisterhood' based on shared or common oppression. 'Sisterhood' is taken as fact rather than goal, since all women form part of that already constituted, non-contradictory category Woman. The concept of 'sisterhood' implicitly asserts that "there exists a commonality of interests and/or goals amongst all women", an assumption which "systematically" ignores different social, ethnic, cultural locations of women and the ethnic and/or class context of feminist struggle (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983: 62). Furthermore, the focus on common oppression mirrors sexist ideology which ascribes the status of 'victim' to women, and thus the basis for 'sisterhood' is shared victimization, a particularly uninspiring political discourse (hooks, 1984: 45). With respect to both the elements 'common' and 'oppression', the discursive construction of 'sisterhood' "was [and is] a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality" (hooks, 1984: 44).

Ultimately, theory which rests upon the assumption of Woman as an unproblematic, coherent and stable category of analysis is ahistorical and acultural, forcefully asserts the gender identity of female subjects as primary, sets up a hierarchy of 'feminist' and 'non-feminist' issues, absolves white bourgeois women from confronting their complex status as both oppressed and oppressor, and creates a delineation or '*feministómetro*' of what constitutes legitimate 'feminist struggle' (Sternbach et al, 1992: 219; Mohanty, 1991b: 64; hooks, 1984: 46). In the case of the concept of 'sisterhood', for example, the focus on shared victimization has meant that white women could "abdicate their responsibility for their role in the maintenance and perpetuation of sexism, racism and classism" and that all "women had to conceive of themselves as "victims" in order to feel that feminist movement was relevant to their lives" (hooks, 1984: 46, 45). With respect to the hierarchization of issues, "the construction of the (implicitly consensual) priority of issues around which apparently all women are expected to organize" (for example,

sexuality and the representation of women in the media ²) does not reflect the plurality of women's experiences of oppression and demonstrates the way in which feminist knowledge production--like all knowledge production--has in it inscribed power-relations which exclude and marginalize (Mohanty, 1991b: 53). The prioritization of issues also ignores--or even reinforces--the contradictions that exist among women due to their various membership in other social groups which invest some women with power over others. Amos and Parmar argue that 'feminist' issues are ultimately those "which in the main have contributed to an improvement in the material situation of a small number of white middle-class women often at the expense of their Black and working-class 'sisters'...The power of sisterhood stops at the point at which hard political decisions need to be made and political priorities decided" (Amos and Parmar, 1984: 4). Subsequently, the inability of feminist theoretical knowledge to account for the plurality of women's experience has created obstacles to the mobilization of women from many locations under the feminist banner. As bell hooks has asked, why should women of colour "join with women who exploit us to help liberate them"? (hooks, 1984: 50) Ahistorical theory thus takes the place of "analytically demonstrating the production of women as socioeconomic political groups within particular local contexts" and impedes the effective development of locally relevant strategies of resistance (Mohanty, 1991b: 64).

² This comment should not be taken to mean that sexuality is not an important issue for women in the third world. In fact, in the last decade, there has been a flowering of debates over sexuality, sexual freedom, reproductive control and pornography in Latin American women's movements, particularly as they relate to the economic position of women. However, it is important to recognize that the priorities for struggle need not revolve around those set by Western women, for whom sexuality has been an important issue. Instead, we must recognize that insofar as the position of women in the third world is shot through with class, for example, feminist struggle may revolve around the ability of women to reproduce the family in the context of international capitalism, structural adjustment programs and environmental degradation. For the articulation of women's interests with environmentalism, Indian women's movements are instructive (see Agarwal, 1988). In other instances, the experience of women factory workers--in the *maquiladoras* or in the export processing zones of South East Asia--may emerge as struggles for unionisation as a way to combat sexual harassment and gendered pay scales. In other words, it is impossible to predetermine the way women will prioritize issues around which they will struggle, and how they will do so.

In addition to invisibilization, the collapsing of women into the category 'Woman' has also led to the misrepresentation of women. This equation produces analyses which not only assert identical experiences of gender oppression for all women, but which also seek to find cases which support such an assumption. Therefore, many Western feminist analyses of women in the third world are not about "uncovering the material and ideological specificities that constitute a particular group of women as "powerless" in a particular context. It is, rather, [about] finding a variety of cases of "powerless" groups of women to prove the general point that women as a group are powerless" (Mohanty, 1991b: 57).

The misrepresentation of 'non-Western' women is primarily achieved through what Mohanty calls the practice of "discursive colonization", which refers to "a certain mode of appropriation and codification of "scholarship" and "knowledge" about women in the third world by particular analytic categories employed in specific writings on the subject which take as their referent feminist interests as they have been articulated in the U.S. and Western Europe" (Mohanty, 1991b: 52). This linguistic imperialism produces a category of "Others" by the implicit use of the "white Western woman" (itself a totalizing discursive construction) as the norm for legitimate experience and political practice.

When a discourse "sets up its own authorial subjects as the implicit referent, i.e., the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural Others", when this discourse makes distinctions "on the basis of the privileging of a particular group as the norm or referent", not only has reality been distorted: we have witnessed the exercise of power (Mohanty, 1991b: 55, 56). In this sense, the ability to name reality is tightly articulated with power: "Representations of the world...are social facts--that is, effects and instruments of power--not pristine descriptions of an external reality to which the theorist can appeal as the ultimate arbiter of truth" (Escobar, 1992: 62). Lugones and Spelman point to the concrete way in which unequal relations of power allow white women to substitute their reality for that of Woman: "systematic, sustained reflection on being a woman...is most likely to be

done by women who vis-à-vis other women enjoy a certain amount of political, social and economic privilege because of their skin color, class membership, ethnic identity", a point which is also made by Harding (Lugones and Spelman, 1983: 574; Harding, 1986: 646-7). The luxury of relative invulnerability with respect to these other aspects of identity--in other words, power--allows the illusion of generating universally applicable feminist theory which only refers to the specific historical experiences of particularly situated (white, Western) women.

Mohanty argues that misrepresentation occurs through a process of conflating descriptive generalizations with the analytic ascription of meaning to such generalizations, a practice which is ahistorical and acultural. This conflation occurs both in the interpretation of "data", "indicators" or "proof", as well as in the application of concepts (Mohanty, 1991b: 68-69). She writes that "[s]uperficially similar situations may have radically different, historically specific explanations, and cannot be treated as identical" (Mohanty, 1991b: 68). Instead, "data" and conceptual tools must be firmly grounded in a local, contextual analysis, and their universal applicability or meaning cannot be assumed, as it "can create a false sense of the commonality of oppressions, interests, and struggles between and among women globally. Beyond sisterhood there are still racism, colonialism, and imperialism!" (Mohanty, 1991b: 68). Therefore, for Mohanty, any feminist analysis which collapses the distinction between 'Woman' and 'women' "eventually ends up constructing monolithic images of "third world women" by ignoring the complex and mobile relationships between their historical materiality on the level of specific oppressions and political choices, on the one hand, and their general discursive representations, on the other" (Mohanty, 1991b: 69).

The result of such a practice is for the Western feminist to "discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular 'third world woman'", a practice which

reflects privilege, ethnocentric universality, inadequate self-consciousness and material relations of power that must be deconstructed and challenged (Mohanty, 1991b: 53). The ethnocentrism of the construct 'third world woman' robs women in their various locations of their agency and thus constrains our ability to see their (sometimes potential) power, resistance, and strategic alliances. As Lugones and Spelman argue, the articulation of the meaning of one's life is a fundamental aspect of our experience: it not only increases the chances that such accounts will be true, but also "the articulation of experience...is among the hallmarks of a self-determining individual or community" (Lugones and Spelman, 1983: 574). Ethnocentrism--which, like sexism, produces accounts that are at best "a function of ignorance; and at worst malicious lies, a function of a knowledgeable desire to exploit and oppress"--debilitates women in their attempt to give accounts of their lives and develop relevant strategies for change (Lugones and Spelman, 1983: 574).

Self-reflection is therefore particularly crucial in work purporting to make theoretical and political contributions to the development of resistance against all forms of economic, political, social and cultural domination and oppression. Mohanty exhorts Western feminists to question their place in the global political economy, for "[t]o do any less would be to ignore the complex interconnections between first and third world economies and the profound effect of this on the lives of women in all countries" (Mohanty, 1991b: 54). In conclusion, therefore Mohanty writes that

An analysis of "sexual difference" in the form of a cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy or male dominance leads to the construction of a similarly reductive and homogenous notion of what I call the "third world difference"--that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in these countries. And it is in the production of this "third world difference" that Western feminisms appropriate and "colonize" the constitutive complexities which characterize the lives of women in these countries. It is in this process of discursive homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world that power is exercised in much of recent Western feminist discourse, and this power needs to be defined and named (Mohanty, 1991b: 53-54).

Epistemological and Methodological Approaches to the Political Economy of Resistance

"No quiero hablar por ti sino contigo." ³ --Maria Lugones, 1983

The preceding epistemological discussion has a direct impact on the manner in which I will approach the successes, contradictions and obstacles experienced by women active in human rights organizing in Argentina. The position that Western discourses on resistance in the third world are rife with ethnocentrism, imperialism and racism, and reflect unequal relations of power in the global political economy, forms the epistemological platform from which I will assess prevailing approaches to the issue of praxis. In particular, the insights from the post-colonial feminist critique of Western knowledge production call for an assessment of Marxist and post-Marxist accounts of Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, an assessment which will problematize the theoretical universalisms which lead to the inappropriate denunciation or exaltation of the strategies and discourses of this movement. Therefore, my goal for the rest of this project will be to develop a concrete analysis of the socioeconomic and political specificities of organizing resistance in Argentina. Epistemologically, this involves the application of the following insights:

A) on the issue of subjectivity and subjects, knowers and the known:

Our prior discussions clearly show that subjectivity can no longer be thought of as unitary or homogenous; instead, we must begin to think of people as materially situated in a number of cross-cutting, sometimes contradictory, sometimes reinforcing relations of power. This is true both for those involved in projects of resistance as well as for those who are attempting to understand those projects. This insight is ontologically important in that it disallows the construction of a universal subject against which all individual subjects are measured, an issue which will be further explored in Chapter 2. This means that we

³ "I don't want to speak *for* you, but *with* you".

must all relinquish the ability or desire to claim and prescribe what kind of political activity is most appropriate for Argentine women. This is not to say that one cannot point to relationships that are undeniably oppressive or constraining for women and not to say that evaluations can't be made. However, it is to say that the manner in which women should deal with their situation cannot be determined *a priori*, or couched in terms of absolute knowledge. Instead, one must approach this research (indeed all research) with the realization that our truth claims are subject to debate.

The notion of multiple subjectivity also signals the importance of not predetermining the meaning of action, and places the focus on the self-understanding of agents. This project will therefore examine the self-understandings of politically active women with respect to their identity, goals, strategies and discourses, the way women manipulate and use dominant discourses to their political advantage, and critically examine the ways in which this practice is *both* liberating and constraining. 'Self-understandings' will be sought through the published interviews with Las Madres, with a heavy reliance on those found in Jo Fisher's works.

Ultimately, what this notion of multiple subjectivity entails is an appreciation of difference. Difference will be taken as an ontological fact which must become the foundation of *solidarity*, not "sisterhood" or any other notion which relies on a false sense of unity. As bell hooks writes,

[w]omen do not need to eradicate difference to feel solidarity. We do not need to share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression. We do not need anti-male sentiments to bond us together, so great is the wealth of experience, culture, and ideas we have to share with one another. We can be sisters united by shared interests and beliefs, united in our appreciation for diversity, united in our struggle to end sexist oppression, united in political solidarity." (hooks, 1984: 65)

The practical implications of foregrounding difference is that the Western referent must be consciously challenged and jettisoned, else 'difference' will easily become 'Other'. This is a difficult process for any researcher, for one's cultural assumptions form part of one's

interpretation of the world, but doubly so for a researcher situated in the West, where the construction of Other is centred and condoned.

Therefore, the notion of the multiple and situated subject promotes an outlook which opens up the analysis to various kinds of subjectivities, political projects and strategies, and sees a multiplicity of activities as potentially radical and political. The acceptance of difference is an essential part of transcending the rigid categories of Western intellectual traditions, be they class, gender, revolution, or patriarchy.

B) concerning structures, or the relations of power:

The validation of multiple subjectivities and political projects does not, however, mean that one can relinquish a sense of the real, material relations of power which are manifest in political institutions, the organization of production and the production of meanings. Rather, what this discussion emphasizes is that material relations of power in fact make a great deal of difference epistemologically speaking, for they provide the resources for certain groups of people to generate (mis)understandings of the world and assert the truth of these frameworks. Therefore, we must recognize the relationship between these relations of power and the production of ideas about those relations, an issue which will be further explored in Chapter 2.

A retention of the importance of structures of power means, then, that one must give a comprehensive account of context. This means that Chapter 3 will focus the specific dynamics of Argentine political economy (both domestic and international), the actors (both class, non-class, and institutional), discourses, and spaces for resistance which evolve with changes in the larger context. With particular reference to Las Madres, the analysis will examine the construction of 'Woman' and femininity in the Argentine context in order to appreciate the revolutionary nature of women's organizing, the historically/culturally specific locations of women, the contradictions between the discursively-constructed "Woman" in Argentina and the material realities of different groups of women, and the

spaces for resistance found by women when faced with these contradictions. Women are not objects in this analysis, but are subjects or agents of their own history. Moreover, in an examination of context, we can begin to understand how it is that some identities and strategies are both made possible or seriously constrained. The primary example of this in the Argentine case is the impossibility of organizing around class identities and issues in the face of a highly repressive class war and a project of economic restructuring predicated upon the desire to destroy the power of the organized working class. Furthermore, the highly conservative nature of the regime's ideological stance also made organizing around more radical feminist demands highly improbable, and we can also appreciate the strategic importance of organizing around traditional female roles as a way to avoid the violent sanctioning of the state. With a sense of concrete historical context we can therefore emerge with a sense of people's creativity in the face of a contracting set of political opportunities which a more narrow conception of appropriate political identities and strategies fails to provide.

Finally, it is also important to recognize that, as in the discussion of multiple subjectivities, material reality is also contradictory. Contradiction is the seed of understanding, and can be creatively used on several levels in this project. As a disturbing incongruity, contradiction leads to questioning and investigation, critique and self-critique. As such, contradiction can be an ontological feature of the project by examining the multiple opposing processes at work in Argentina during the dictatorship and the transition to democracy. The space where these processes clash forms the terrain for politics, for contradiction in an ontological sense betrays a crack in the coherence of systemic domination. In Argentina we should examine the contradiction between formal democratization and processes of economic internationalization and the effects for local control and autonomy; the contradiction between the contraction of public space under dictatorship through repression, and the simultaneous construction of new political

identities which arose out of response to the effects of repression; and the contradiction between official discourses on femininity and the material conditions which propelled women into the political sphere in order to elucidate the emergence, development, strategic thinking, and decline of Las Madres as a new collective actor.

Epistemologically, contradiction also forms a key intellectual strategy for combatting ethnocentrism and the reproduction of discursive (and material) domination. Harding embraces contradiction and instability as a key element in a feminist epistemology that attempts to transcend the problems with Enlightenment science. She exhorts us to "embrace the instability of analytical categories; to find in the instability itself the desired theoretical reflection of certain aspects of the political reality in which we live and think; to use these instabilities as a resource for our thinking and practices" (Harding, 1986: 648). This epistemological approach accepts an ontology of change--the world is in flux, that social relations are constantly changing, as are the experiences and perspectives of differently located subjects. As well, Harding welcomes contradiction and ambiguity as creative, productive conditions, and she therefore asserts that "[f]eminist analytical categories should be unstable--consistent and coherent theories in an unstable and incoherent world are obstacles to both our understanding and our social practices" (Harding, 1986: 649). On the level of the researcher, the conscious search for discontinuities between my own experience and the experiences of women in Argentina must be the basis for self-critique.

Finally, I wish to signal that my own situation as a white, Western intellectual is problematic, and the successful execution of this project must involve a recognition of the power which these locations provide me with. This is a necessary intellectual process in order to create genuinely useful theory which is respectful and does not measure women according to an arbitrary and politicized standard. Unfortunately, this is the most personally difficult and uncertain of processes, for it is only in dialogue with the women

you are describing and analyzing that privilege can be actively exposed. Lugones and Spelman go so far as to suggest that the only situation in which Western privilege will not be reproduced is if theorists approach their work with the genuine desire of friendship with those that are being theorized. Only if theorization occurs together--white women and women of colour--in a "genuine and reciprocal dialogue" can the theory of white women be unproblematic (Lugones and Spelman, 1983: 577). It is at this point that I should say that I was not able to carry out field research, and as such, this work should be seen as the starting point for future research and the validity of my evaluations should at least be followed by a question mark. However, while I agree with this criterion, I would also suggest another (perhaps complementary) strategy for rejecting Western privilege and producing theory that is useful and sensitive to the multiplicity of experience: the use of a shared political commitment to the eradication of oppression in general as the foundation of solidarity and research. The active political commitments of researchers can, I believe, help people transcend the ethnocentrism and power of the Western intellectual enterprise. This commitment is one which seeks to eliminate oppression in all its many forms, a commitment which is not uniformly present in all of feminism and Marxism. To reiterate Mohanty's important commentary: "it is not color or sex which constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather, it is the way we think about race, class, and gender--the political links we choose to make among and between struggles" (Mohanty, 1991a: 4).

Chapter 2: Theoretical Approaches to the Political Economy of Resistance

It is impossible to deny that, in the late twentieth century, the context for struggle has been dramatically transformed. Although the causality and direction of these changes is currently the subject of great debate (its epistemological contours having been briefly examined in Chapter One), it is nonetheless apparent to all observers that traditional modes of political organizing and mobilization have come under significant attack. Specifically, a sustained critique of class politics has called into question both the Marxist understanding of the field of political action as well as the political responses which flow from this ontology. Moreover, the critics of Marxist praxis--variously referred to as post-Marxists, new social movement theorists, the 'new revisionists', and (somewhat derogatorily) the 'new true socialists'--have attempted to develop an alternative understanding of politics and resistance which more accurately reflects the activities of 'the movements on the ground'. In light of the basic issue raised in Chapter One--specifically, the extent to which the world is knowable enough to develop concerted and coherent theory and practice--it is important that we reexamine what seem to be the two major frameworks for understanding political struggle: Marxism and post-Marxism. It is my contention that while the critique of the universal subject and the possibility of infallible knowledge--found in post-Marxism and post-structuralism more generally--has its validity, it is not the case that the field of political struggle is the stuff of contingency only. Therefore, I think it crucial to explore those theoretical aspects of Marxism and post-Marxism most pertinent to the development of strategies of resistance, particularly what is said about the agent of struggle, the nature of the field of political action, and the political strategies to be pursued. In other words, what I take from the post-structuralist challenge is precisely that: a challenge to examine previously compelling understandings in a new light, in order to comprehend what still pertains, and what must be retheorized. I will ultimately argue that an understanding of

resistance is most fruitfully advanced through the thorough examination of both the material and discursive realms, both of which structure human activity and provide the arenas for human intervention.

Marxism, Class Struggle, and Revolutionary Praxis

Marxism, in all its many variants, and regardless of its successes and failures, has provided both the beacon and the framework for revolutionary struggle in the twentieth century. As a paradigm for the study of social relations, Marxism has provided a powerful critique of the multiple processes and deleterious effects of capitalism and has politicized generations of intellectuals in the pursuit of human emancipation. The analytical category of class highlights the important ramifications of differential relations to the means of production in terms of political, social, and cultural power, and fundamentally challenges legalistic conceptions of freedom as forwarded by liberal thinkers. This insistence on the existence of a link between the situatedness of people vis-a-vis the means and relations of production and the formation of interests and consciousness has provided crucial insights into who are the likely participants in anti-capitalist revolution. Furthermore, Marxist theorizations regarding the capitalist nature of the state have ameliorated our understanding of how political structures serve to sustain and reproduce the conditions for capital accumulation, and point to an important terrain for political struggle. Finally, the concept of revolution, or complete break with capitalist relations of production as crucial for the inauguration of fully human social relations, has shaped the character of political activism and strategy internationally.

However, there is a crisis in Marxist thought and politics. In part it is the crisis in the connection between theory and political practice that is internal to Marxism. Perry Anderson suggests that with Althusser, there was initiated a tendency toward the "rupture of political unity between Marxist theory and mass practice" (Anderson, 1976: 66). Ellen

Wood writes that this 'obsessive methodologism' was shared by many Marxists, and "questions of theoretical form displaced issues of political substance" (Wood, 1986: 18). However, whether this crisis played out on the level of intellectual debate or on the terrain of political movements and transformations is not directly relevant. What is fundamental is that, in the face of this crisis, challenges from all quarters began to batter what is now commonly referred to as the monolith of Marxism. These challenges refer to the political implications of Marxism's imputed determinism, essentialism, reductionism and orthodoxy, evident in both theory and practice. The extent to which these charges are true is a crucial question for socialists, not only for what they imply about the way we understand the social and political world, but also because scores of intellectuals and activists have rejected what has been considered the guiding light of emancipatory struggle, and have taken to developing new modes of theorizing about and doing resistance.

This section will attempt to summarize those Marxist conceptions which have been central to issues of praxis: class, class consciousness, the state as primary terrain of struggle, and revolution as the route to socialism and human emancipation. In the face of the phenomenal diversity in the Marxist tradition, this section will attempt to focus on those common threads that can be found throughout Marxist thinking. The post-Marxist critique will be offered, demonstrating some of the (real and perceived) weaknesses in this mode of analysis for understanding contemporary forms of struggle.

The Classical Marxist Paradigm

As signalled above, one is presented with a problem when attempting to evaluate Marxist theory and praxis. Clearly, the short-hand categorization 'Marxism' is called to encompass an extremely heterogenous tradition. As Barry Smart aptly points out: "Marxism is a veritable cauldron of interpretations and schools of thought" (Smart, 1983: 4). Although it may legitimately be asserted that the foundational concepts of Marxist

political economy and theory are shared by all working within the framework, it is difficult to claim that all Marxists understand these in the same way. A mere glance at the voluminous internal debates over the nature and constitution of class, the character and function of the state, the appropriate relationship between parties and working-class organizations, and the form of strategic and tactical struggles against capital (to name but a few) testifies to the indeterminate nature of Marxist theory and politics. As such, it is (and always has been) problematic to refer to 'Marxist theory' as a totality, a single, uniform set of propositions that can be ascribed to all Marxists.¹

It can be said, however, that class is of primary importance to all Marxists. This is true in two senses: class relations and class struggles are held to both definitional of history and its prime mover; and the working class under capitalism is singularly positioned to effect the defeat of capital. What, specifically, do these two assertions mean?

Flowing from Marx's assumptions about human nature, which held that human beings were essentially creative and productive, is the notion that relationships to work are in some way fundamental to the entire social structure. As Ellen Wood argues, Marxism begins with the premise that "production is essential to human existence and the organization of social life" (Wood, 1986: 188). In other words, it matters very much how societies organize themselves in order to meet human needs. For Marx, it was the fact that access to control over the means of production in capitalism was structured unequally, such that the few that owned were able to receive the fruits of other people's labour (through economic or extra-economic coercion), that led him to assert in the *Communist Manifesto* that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle". Involved in

¹ While the foregoing may seem a set of truisms, I say this in reference to the nature of the debate between Marxists and post-Marxists, as it appears evident that those now working 'outside' Marxism and reflecting on its weaknesses do not possess an appreciation of the richness and variability to be found within the tradition. To some extent, it is in response to the sense of 'being misunderstood' that I address myself in this chapter.

this materialist characterization of history are both transformations at the level of productive forces, as well as transformations at the level of class consciousness. In other words, in that technological development and the reorganization of production eventually cumulate to produce new social relations of production which conflict with the old set of social relations, the process of economic development itself sharpens the division between the interests of classes. Similarly, insofar as classes are situated vis-à-vis the relations of production such that their interests are fundamentally opposed, the process of reorganizing the forces of production heightens consciousness of this opposition and leads people to struggle (although by no means automatically and without a series of political and ideological mediations).

If we accept for the moment that class struggle is the motor of historical change, in what sense does the *working* class derive its status as an agent of revolutionary change for Marxists? In the capitalist mode of production, the relationship between producers is framed by one's relationship to the means of production: specifically, whether or not one owns property in the means of production or must sell one's labour power for a wage. This fundamental distinction between owners and non-owners is characterized by an exploitative relationship, in the sense that workers who produce value through their labour not only go uncompensated for the full value of their work--this surplus value becomes profit for the capitalist--they also have no control over the character, process and ends of production, and are therefore subject to the control and discipline of others. In this configuration of the social relations of production, Marx (and Marxists) ask what people are situated and have interests in the transformation of the production relations and the abolition of class itself? It seems unproblematic to conclude that this is the working class, "people who by virtue of their situation in the relations of production and exploitation share certain fundamental interests" (Wood, 1986: 189). Wood thus argues that it is the working class who can "uniquely advance the cause of socialism (though not completely achieve it)

even *without* conceiving socialism as their class objective, by pursuing their material class interests, because these interests are by nature essentially opposed to capitalist exploitation and to a class-dominated organization of production" (Wood, 1986: 189).

Consequently, the working class, in following their objective interests against capitalist exploitation, will act in the universal interest. For Marxists, the proletariat is that subject so positioned in the relations of production/exploitation "which intrinsically contained a critical consciousness of the given social totality, and the possibility of reconstructing this totality on a basis which allows man [sic] to achieve knowledge and control of the world which surrounds him [sic]" (Magri, 1970: 3). In other words, the actual experience of all the mechanisms which rule capitalist society--"the nature of human labour as a commodity, the separation between man [sic] and work, and universal alienation"--gives the proletariat an epistemological advantage in the ability to know these mechanisms (Magri, 1970: 3). As such, these assertions are based on the assumption that there exists some key relationship between one's position in material relations of power and our ability to generate ideas about these relations. Moreover, the working class is the only group strategically placed to destroy capital: "since the working class itself *creates* capital, and since the organization of production and appropriation place the collective worker at the heart of the whole capitalist structure, the working class has a unique capacity to destroy capital" (Wood, 1986: 189). Finally, the working class also possesses the capacity to replace capitalist forms of production with self-directed or socialist ones (Wood, 1986: 90-91). As such, the working class, in pursuing its own liberation through the establishment of socialism, is said to act in the universal interests of all human beings. This is the case in two senses: "[f]irstly, in freeing itself, it must at the same time liberate the oppressing class, a prisoner of the very mechanism through which it rules. Secondly, and more generally, this liberation frees man [sic] from his separation from society and his subordination to the blind forces of history, making possible a society which has become

'fully human'" (Magri, 1970: 3). Therefore, Wood concludes along with Marx and the tradition as a whole, that there exists an organic connection between the working class and the socialist project (Wood, 1986: 190).

How is this socialist project to be realized? While there is a crucial place for local struggles at the site of production (through trade union activity primarily), an important aspect of this struggle is directed and oriented around the state. It is useful to discuss here Marxist theorization of the state in order to elucidate why it is deemed important in the struggle against capitalism. As the state was an undertheorized aspect in Marx's own writings, debates emerged in the post-war period regarding the nature of the state in capitalist economies in order to address the failure of newly enfranchised working class voters to overturn capitalism through electoral means. Marx did reject the Hegelian notion of the state as embodying general interests, and insisted upon the state being the defender of the interests of property. However, the questions of how and why the formally distinct institution of the state acts in the interests of the propertied classes remained unanswered in early Marxist theorizing (Miliband in Bottomore, 1991: 520-21). As well, there was a tendency until the 1970s for analyses to resort to a "crude reductionism" which deemed the state purely epiphenomenal and at the beck and call of capitalism (Mahon, 1991: 120).

Hence, neo-Marxist theorizations have concentrated heavily upon the connection between the state and domestic capital. Despite the seemingly fractious Miliband-Poulantzas debate, most Marxists held that "the state was intimately involved in the reproduction of capitalist relations. At the same time, it was no mere instrument of monopoly capital: the separation of the economic and political, which is one of the basic characteristics of capitalism, gave the state a certain relative autonomy" (Mahon, 1991: 121). Thus, both domestically and internationally, the state was conceived of as acting in the interests of capital, although debates were particularly vigorous over how the relative autonomy of the state should be understood (Mahon, 1991: 121).

In any case, the function of the state in capitalist society made it necessary to resist in specifically political ways, in addition to economic resistance at the level of production. Because of the apparent separation in liberal capitalist societies between the realm of the economic and the political, the fact that the state acted in the interests of capital accumulation was obscured (both in terms of formal structures and in terms of ideological constructs, that is, liberal ideology). The state, neo-Marxists contend, is that institution which, through the maintenance of the conditions of accumulation (that is, defending property rights and enforcing contracts), the securing of consent from the subordinate classes, and the occasional use of coercion, allows for the large-scale reproduction of capital and capitalism (Harvey, 1984: 18; Panitch, 1977: 8). Moreover, because of the relative autonomy of the state (which is, of course, variable over time and space, and must be examined at a concrete level), it is possible for this institution to defend capital as a whole against the contradictions of capitalist development and the short-term interests of specific capitals (Harvey, 1984: 30, 34). In other words, it has become the case that the state, whether because of the interpenetration of actual state personnel and capitalists or because of the structural power of capital to determine the economic prosperity of the state and nation, acts to preserve capitalism.

These understandings of the economic and the political lead Marxists to advocate certain strategic measures, the goal being the eradication of unequal relations in production and in politics. Given that both the structures of capitalist production and the capitalist state are irremediably skewed to favour some classes over others, and at the expense of others, Marxists hold that it is the revolutionary action of the working class which can and must create a new society. However, it is the case that there has been significant internal debate over the term "revolutionary action", and it is safe to say that no consensus has ever been reached on the strategic question. It is possible to discern two broad approaches to strategy, the traditional distinction being made between reformist and revolutionary

trajectories. The reformist position, also referred to as evolutionist, gradualist, parliamentarist or social democratic, holds that it is possible to move beyond capitalism to socialism through electoral struggle, the end of which is to achieve control over the state. Reformists have argued that an electoral constituency for working class or social democratic parties indeed exists, and moreover, that it forms the majority of the electorate. As such, through a focus on party politics, the social democratic left believed it was possible to capture state power and gradually institute reforms which would benefit "workers" or "the people" at the expense of capital. In other words, reformists averred that it was possible to gradually eliminate capitalist social relations through legislative measures (Przeworski, 1985: 16). As Adam Przeworski points out, several additional elements were added to the social democratic project over the course of the twentieth century, most pertinent of which were the shift from "workers' party" to the "party of the people", the adoption of the welfare state and discretionary fiscal policy as a way to mute the ill-effects of capitalist social relations, and the growing belief in a mixed economy wherein public (state) and private (capitalist) enterprise could coexist (Przeworski, 1985: 23-4, 36-7). The acceptance of these elements meant that reformists eventually came to believe in the possibilities for a humane capitalism, a belief which had profound effects on reformist strategies. In particular, the expansion of the constituency of such parties in the attempt to capture a majority led to a shift from class-based discourse to one of nationalism, and the acceptance of capitalism as remediable meant that the fundamental relationship between capital and labour was no longer problematized, except in terms of improving the working conditions within capitalist production and attempting to eradicate the reserve army of labour through full employment policies.

These positions have long been the source of great and often acrimonious debate on the left, leading others to deem the social democratic project as non-Marxist. As a counterpoint, revolutionary strategies hold that it is impossible to reform capitalist

economic and social relations; rather, the economic, political, cultural and ideological frameworks of capitalism must be wholly replaced through mass action. Even here, however, there is great diversity, and it is worthwhile to discuss the commonalities and distinctions between the Leninist and Gramscian positions (particularly when assessing the legitimacy of the post-Marxist critiques).² For both, the working class is the agent of change, but it is not automatically conscious of its oppression or of the methods by which it may effect such a transformation of social relations. The role of the party is important, therefore, but this is not a party in the electoral sense (as it is for the social democrats). Instead, the party is the organizer of (counter)hegemony which develops the consciousness of the working class. It is here, on the question of the process or mechanism by which the party is to organize and produce such consciousness, that Lenin and Gramsci part ways. Neither held to the more 'spontaneist' position associated with Rosa Luxemburg, who wrote that through struggle the working class will realize its historical role, or Karl Kautsky, who believed that the objective forces of capitalist development would create the conditions for a new social order, of which the proletariat would only be a reflection (Magri, 1970: 13-14, 11). For Lenin, it was not possible to allow "history" to run its course, as its outcomes are never inevitable. Therefore, Lenin held that the revolutionary party, based on the principles of unity, discipline and democratic centralism, was the interpreter of historical conditions and would lead the proletariat in an overthrow of the capitalist state in order to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat. Gramsci saw Lenin's theorizations and practices as emerging from the particular social context of still feudal Russia, in which both state and civil society were weak and therefore a war of movement was possible (even if it wasn't ultimately successful). For Gramsci, however, in contexts where the state was stronger and was extended into civil society and the realms of culture

² An excellent discussion of the differences within Marxist revolutionary strategy can be found in Lucio Magri's piece on the mass party, 1970.

and ideology, a party fighting a war of position at the grass-roots was necessary. Here the party and the working class were to be in a dialectical relationship, mediated by intellectuals, and transforming the cultural and ideological understandings of social relations which would undermine support for the capitalist system (Magri, 1970: 20). In this way, the party does not directly take over the state, but prefigures through its practices the social relations of the new society, drawing more and more people to it through the construction of a historic bloc (Magri, 1970: 21). What is important to note here is that although the revolutionary methods of Gramsci and Lenin differ, with one focussing on civil society and the other on the conquest of the state, it is clear that they both reject the gradualism of electoral politics, understand that consciousness of oppression is not a thing but a process, and advocate the wholesale replacement of capitalist political structures by the working class or its agencies.

In sum, then, the Marxist approach to issues of resistance entails a focus on the fundamental material relations of production and the social relations which emerge out of their specific organization under capitalism. As such, Marxists hold that the class whose interests are most opposed by these social relations is the working class, which will therefore--through struggle--come to oppose capitalism in all of its manifestations. Moreover, the objects of this oppositional struggle are economic production relations, the political institution of the state, and the cultural/ideological systems produced to support this system.

Critiques of the Marxist Approach

Although there have always been critics of Marxism, this discussion will confine itself to treatment of those perspectives which have arisen in the past 15 years from within the ranks of Marxist intellectuals. Perhaps these critiques can best be unified as a rejection of Marxism's "will to totality". As Paul Patton describes it, Marxism's 'totalizing'

tendency adopts a unitary conception of the political subject embodied in the class actor, "enjoins us to address society as a whole and is accompanied by a commitment to a unitary project of emancipation that may leave no room for the specific, limited concerns of 'marginal' social movements" (Patton, 1988: 130). Similarly, Warren Magnussen and Rob Walker characterize the problem of Marxist theory and practice as one intrinsic to the search for "The Way" to liberation, a quest which underpins the unitary vision of actors, locations for struggle and strategies for resistance and ultimately is debilitating (Magnussen and Walker, 1988: 39). The rejection of the historical 'meta-narrative' of Marxism, and the exhortation to move beyond some or all of its analytical categories and political strategies, stems from the assessment (by these critics) that the deformations they speak of are inherent in Marxist theory and are not remediable. These fundamental flaws of Marxism are, specifically: the privileging of class as an analytical category, class oppression under capitalism as the locus of inequality, and the working class as historical/revolutionary subject; the reductionist notion of objective interests, be they class interests or otherwise; the privileging of the workplace and the state as the locus of struggle; and the advocacy of large-scale revolutionary change, which is deemed not only as strategically inappropriate, but also as hierarchical and suppressing the plurality of local struggles.

Post-Marxists make several objections to class as an organizing category of political analysis. Firstly, they claim that the working class has refused its revolutionary role. This claim is often supported by one of two sets of assertions. The first is associated with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, who, in their denial of a determining link between the material and the ideological, argue that the relations of production do not in themselves guarantee or even promote the development of critical or socialist consciousness on the part of workers. Because there is no necessary relationship between materiality and consciousness, workers are likely to identify themselves otherwise (as consumers, or as members of a particular ethnic group, for example). The second argument, associated with

Andre Gorz, holds that the working class is not revolutionary because their interests are essentially economistic and sectional. In this way, the working class is the mirror of capital and is not interested in defeating capital, but in securing the availability of work and extending the benefits accruing to them under the capitalist system (Gorz, 1982: 96) and therefore the working class and its organizations "cannot seriously be taken to encompass the needs and aspirations of all oppressed and exploited groups in society, and that the working class is not therefore that 'universal class', whose own liberation must signify the liberation of all such groups" (Miliband, 1985: 8).

The above critique regarding the unwillingness or inability of the working class to engage in revolutionary anti-capitalist struggle springs directly from the more general post-Marxist charge that the Marxist conceptualization of the relationship between the economic and the political is fundamentally flawed. It is charged that the base/superstructure model, which gives primacy to material relations of production in the explanation of politics and ideology, is determinist in that it asserts that the objective conditions of economic production give rise to classes in political form. Moreover, this Marxist model leads to the notion that the working class will somehow automatically come to struggle--in line with its objective class interest--against capital and subsequently for socialism. It is undoubtedly true that some variants of Second International Marxism--namely the thought of Karl Kautsky--subscribe more or less to this version of determination.³ As such, the notion that there are transparent, readily identifiable interests associated with a particular location within the structure of production relations has given rise to the idea of 'false consciousness', and the political deformations--vanguardism and substitutionism--which have followed from it. Insofar as 'false consciousness' has been an epithet and a political tactic used to reinforce 'the party line', the notion of 'objective interests' does present

³ see Przeworski, "Proletariat into a Class: The Process of Class Formation" in Capitalism and Social Democracy, 1985, especially pp 48-55.

serious problems. This may be particularly true when the notion effectively denies the multifaceted nature of human beings and their situatedness in a multiplicity of social relations.

Furthermore, the extent to which we can clearly locate and ascribe interests to a social group of people called 'the working class' has itself been called into question. In this vein, Laclau and Mouffe assert that "the form of politics for which the division of the social into two antagonistic camps is *an original and immutable datum, prior to all hegemonic construction*" has been in decline since the 1789/1848 revolutions, wherein "the opposition people/ancien regime was the last moment in which the antagonistic limits between two forms of society presented themselves... in the form of clear and empirically *given* lines of demarcation" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 151). Insofar as this is the historical case, because the hegemonic form of politics requires articulatory practice to actually determine "the principle of social division", one can see "the vanity of the aspiration that the 'class struggle' should constitute itself, *in an automatic and a priori manner*, in the foundation of this principle" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 151).

Finally, it is also the case that post-Marxists assert that class is first and foremost an analytical tool

that makes possible the description of social structures in terms of a theoretical model. But more often than not, "social classes" cannot be observed in the empirical realities with which the research is concerned. Thus, whenever we address social reality, looking for social agents of change, we do not see ready-made groups of classes acting organically as such. What we face, on the contrary, is the behaviour of a multiplicity of social actors around a multiplicity of "social movements" that differ in the capacity to cope with existing social conditions. (Calderón, Piscitelli and Reyna, 1992: 34)

In other words, Marxists make the mistake of reification, in that they assert the reality and agency of an essentially theoretical or heuristic category.

Furthermore, post-Marxists call for a "de-centring" of the state from the political strategies of the Left (Magnussen and Walker, 1988: 40). This call is the result of a growing dissatisfaction with the structuralist and productivist equation of "the state" doing

the bidding of "capital", particularly because it implied that the state was the primary terrain for class struggle. (Mahon, 1991: 122-123) The post-Marxist discourse on the state deprivileges it as the main terrain for struggle, for two reasons: 1) the state has lost all possibility of escaping the needs of international capital and therefore it cannot at this time be an instrument of emancipation (Magnussen and Walker, 1988: 44, 53-54; Boggs, 1986: 24-25); and 2) civil society is the site of multiple forms of domination--not just class exploitation--and hence struggle must be waged in a multiplicity of spaces, on a multiplicity of issues (Mahon, 1991: 126).

On the first count, Magnussen and Walker argue that the Left has inherited a reified conception of political space from bourgeois political thought which limits the terrain on which struggle is thought possible and effective (Magnussen and Walker, 1988: 51). Moreover, in this period of global capitalist restructuring, "the re-articulation of political space by capital...further diminishes the value of action within the state-containers" (Magnussen and Walker, 1988: 41). Magnussen and Walker write that while the category of the state "cannot simply be thrown away, for [it is] constitutive of the world we confront" and is "an integral part of the concrete practices in which we participate on a daily basis", the ability of the Left to articulate an "effective political practice...depends upon a struggle to liberate ourselves from these categories" (Magnussen and Walker, 1988: 40). Post-Marxist theorizations on the second issue, that civil society is the site of domination, is elaborated on the expository section on post-Marxism dealing with new sites of struggle.

This theoretical perspective has direct implications for the kinds of political praxis which are seen as effective and legitimate by new social movements. In effect, much of new social movement practice is predicated upon its separation from the state, and explicitly attempts to carve out new kinds of political space in civil society.

Patton also argues against privileging broad-based, revolutionary change as the only legitimate strategy of resistance. While he does not deny that "the perspective of the

totality is an important vector of political calculation", Patton rejects the notion that social change requires that various interests be mediated through alliances, and holds that "[t]he conditions that sustain oppression can be altered piecemeal" (Patton, 1988: 131). Furthermore, he cautions that since "a perspective 'of the totality'...purports to stand outside and...regulate the conflicting demands of particular social movements", it constitutes a position of power which bestows the ability to create a hierarchy of demands within a political alliance.

This is why the injunction to adopt the position of the totality must be resisted from the point of view of these social movements; not because the position of the totality is in itself illegitimate, but simply because it is a different position. The specificity and irreducibility of the minority position have to be defended against all attempts to abolish that difference (Patton, 1988: 133).

The advocacy of such a micropolitics is in direct challenge to most Marxist conceptions of social change, and has the advantage of (potentially) preserving the radical edge of movements not subject to the compromise and pragmatism of alliance/coalition politics.

Post-Marxism, Identity and the Politics of Everyday Life

As we have now seen, the post-Marxist challenge to prevailing Marxist explanations of agency, praxis, and structures of domination under the capitalist mode of production has been both theoretical and political in nature. Although variants are as numerous as theorists, post-Marxist theorists and practitioners alike base their critique on the poststructuralist (and postmodern) rejection of universalist narratives as both false and oppressive. As will be elaborated further, much of post-Marxist theory represents an attempt to account for the actual emergence in the 1960s and 70s of politically mobilized actors which do not seem to fit into the Marxist taxonomy of classes. Instead, non-class actors and identities have been lauded as the new revolutionary agents in this period characterized by the globalization of capital and the weakening of the regulative powers of the state. Furthermore, accompanying this revaluation of multiple subjectivities, post-

Marxists (with some assistance from their post-structuralist colleagues) have problematized the formation of consciousness, and proposed that identities--and therefore the political projects that they mobilize around--are variable with context and dependent upon the outcome of discursive struggles waged to provide alternative meanings for peoples' understandings of themselves and the world. In other words, as we have seen in their critique of Marxism, post-Marxists hold that identity and consciousness are not already constituted or objectively determined by structure, but are themselves the substance of political struggle in this new era. The concern for new subjects and constructed identities in the context of a changing international political economy has had a significant effect on the conceptualization of the terrain for political struggle, shifting it dramatically from the state--as the political representative of capital--to 'civil society', or perhaps more specifically, to the terrain of culture and people's everyday lives. The multiplication of identities ripe for politicization has led to a politicization of private life, and a (re)turn to the notion of the counter-hegemonic war of position as posited by Gramsci (albeit somewhat reworked). Finally, the deprivileging of class identity and class projects lead to a redefinition of socialism as the radical extension of democratic practices, such that the anti-capitalist struggle is but one moment in the 'democratic revolution'. This pluralization of politically relevant agencies, projects and spaces is said to bode well for the democratization of culture, public and private life, as well as for possibilities for resisting domination in a wide variety of ways.

However, post-Marxist theoretical and political projects have come under serious attack from the traditional Left, which, for reasons theoretical, political and emotional, has rejected the more sanguinary and voluntarist aspects of the embrace of identity and civil society. Marxists have challenged the ability of non-class actors to effectively challenge large-scale processes of capitalist domination. They have cautioned that the turn towards civil society indicates a turn away from the state both as an arena for politics and as an

adversary, a move both strategically unwise and potentially regressive in that social movements may in fact reinforce the state in its economic and social projects. As will be discussed, there are some serious warnings to be heeded here. However, it must be noted that the Marxist critique does suffer from elements of vitriol against and genuine misunderstanding of the post-Marxist paradigm. The attempt simply to reassert Marxist categories is not always particularly useful in that it ignores those cogent and necessary correctives offered by the post-Marxist framework, as well as masks other possible critiques of the post-Marxist project. Specifically, the rejection of this new paradigm *in toto* prevents us drawing important insights from post-Marxism, as well as critically examining the ways in which the debate as a whole has become a battle between fictionalized and extremist accounts of the adversary's positions. Such a lack of mutual and nuanced understanding can only prevent us from developing a more cogent understanding of the processes of resistance.

The post-Marxist Paradigm

The post-Marxist paradigm has therefore emerged in response to a perceived failure of Marxist theory to provide an adequate framework of analysis for the radical transformations occurring at the level of the international political economy, political actors and novel emancipatory strategies. For example, Laclau and Mouffe situate their project directly within this context, pointing to the "structural transformations of capitalism" and the processes that have been put into motion as being the source of new forms of domination, new agents, and new political spaces for resistance. For them, advanced industrial countries have moved into a post-industrial period in which there has been a "decline of the classical working class" due to processes of deindustrialization, "increasingly profound penetration of capitalist relations of production in areas of social life" resulting in commodification and massification, and a rise in "forms of

bureaucratization which have characterized the Welfare State" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1987: 80). Boggs also explains this theoretical shift in terms of the attempt to account for the new conditions of "a disintegrating world capitalist system" which "are undermining traditional social and political forces" and in which a declining but still vigorous system of multiple and far-reaching structures of domination has spawned "newly emergent forms of opposition" (Boggs, 1986: 4, 5). Boggs writes that it is the attempt to salvage declining centres of power through "state and regionally directed modes of capital accumulation" and "technological restructuring" aimed at a "comprehensive commodification and rationalization of the world" that has "simultaneously produced counter-tendencies in the form of economic stagnation, ecological crisis, the erosion of pluralist democracy, a decaying bourgeois culture", "poverty, repression, social violence, and a pervasive sense of alienation" out of which resistance has emerged (Boggs, 1986: 4). Marxist categories have subsequently been deemed incapable of accounting for "a more diversified, complex and contradictory horizon of experiences" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1987: 80).

The shift from Marxism to post-Marxism also finds its root in the assimilation of Marxist theory into official Party and State doctrines, as well as the effects of the academicization of Marxism. The experiences of state socialism and the domination of popular struggles by vanguardist Party elites in both the North and the South has fostered a rigidification of theory and acceptable political practice, particularly supported by the claim to scientificity of Marxist pronouncements emanating from these locations (Boggs, 1986: 7-8). The institutionalization of social democratic parties and their absorption into the operation of the Keynesian welfare state has also led to disillusionment and a perception that the major leftist parties have failed to pursue radical social and cultural change while clinging to the old rhetoric. This increasing moderation of the social democratic program has stemmed from the false "expectation that one could use administrative means to arrive at an emancipated form of life" (Habermas, 1990: 13). Instead, the parties have

encountered "systematic resistance in the state power they had hoped to be able to use as a neutral instrument to universalize civil rights in the welfare state" (Habermas, 1990: 13). The adoption of professional norms by Marxist academics has also led to a loss of a critical, radical and relevant political analysis, and thus an abandonment by disillusioned Marxists and a rejection by new social actors and movements (Boggs, 1986: 7-9). This process has undoubtedly been consolidated by revolutionary upheaval in the Soviet bloc. The purported inability of Marxist theory to cope with such changes has led disenchanted Marxists to develop a self-proclaimed 'post-Marxist' body of theory which fundamentally retheorizes agency, praxis, and the political imaginary which is the goal of resistance.

The theoretical focus on new identities can be seen therefore as a response to the actual emergence of collective actors articulating a series of political and cultural projects not directly related to traditional class actors and class struggles. The proliferation of actors "whose identity is not defined by their place in the process of production or with reference to traditional ideologies of left, right and centre" has spawned both a discussion for the conditions of this proliferation and a problematization and retheorization of the processes of identity formation itself (Canel, 1992: 32).

The notion that class identity is not an automatic given to be read off the objective locations of individuals within the economy has been present in varying degrees throughout the Marxist tradition, but was most developed by Antonio Gramsci, elements of which have been incorporated into post-Marxist discourse by Laclau and Mouffe. Laclau and Mouffe claim that there exist clear continuities between Gramsci's perspectives on consciousness and praxis and the post-Marxist debates which problematize the formation of subjects. In Laclau's earlier work, *Ideology and Politics in Marxist Theory*, he engages in

a polemic with Poulantzas over the class nature of the 'new middle sectors',⁴ in which he claims that ideological factors dominate over material ones vis-a-vis this fraction of the working class (Laclau, 1975: 114). This is because the subjectivity of individuals is not pre-given by any source, be it the economy or any other structure. Instead, there exist class-neutral ideological expressions (for example, popular-democratic ideology) which may be connected or articulated to a multiplicity of class projects, be they that of the working class or the dominant class (Laclau, 1979: 109; Wood, 1986: 51). The nature of class struggle is therefore ideological--that is, the struggle is about presenting the most convincing case in order to win the largest number of people to a particular side--and not about the material experience of exploitation per se (Laclau, 1975: 109). Thus, for Laclau, "the problem was not to assert the class identity of the oppressed but rather to analyze the historically produced symbols of popular resistance embedded in a social formation and to articulate these to the socialist project" (Mahon, 1991: 125).

Laclau and Mouffe have subsequently developed this position in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, situating all subjectivities within discursive practices. Laclau and Mouffe's focus on the indeterminate and constructed nature of identity leads them to develop the concept of articulatory practice as a way to explain how individuals with multiple possible identities come to understand themselves and their position in their environment. Articulation refers to "any practice establishing a relation between elements such that their identity is modified as a result" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 105). Because they understand social life as fundamentally discursive--that is, all meaning is apprehended inside of systems of rules and conventions--and subsequently hold that social processes

⁴ These 'new middle sectors' refer to white-collar workers employed by the state or by capital who work for wages or salary, and who may even exercise disciplinary/coordination control over the work of others, but do not actually own the means of production. They have been variously referred to as the 'new middle class' and the 'new petty bourgeoisie', and their importance is not merely theoretical--rather, this debate is inherently politico-strategic as it attempts to identify possible constituencies for anti-capitalist/socialist struggle. See Wright, 1985; Clement and Myles, 1994.

and identities do not have fixed meaning (they are "situated and open to contestation and reinterpretation"), Laclau and Mouffe see that "actors are left with the only possibility of building collective identities through the *articulation* of meaning" (Escobar, 1992: 78). That is, individuals possess many characteristics, each of which can be appealed to as forming part of a collective identity. The calling on these partial subjectivities is itself part of politics, and is contingent and constructed, a mode of struggle in and of itself.

This reconceptualization of identity formation has significant consequences for the focus of theory, as Escobar summarizes: "[f]irst, identities are never just given; there is no privileged political subject, and all actors have to struggle within their own spheres in a plural political space... What is crucial is how all actors articulate positions for themselves and with other movements or their environment" (Escobar, 1992: 79). Furthermore, the constructedness of identity has a direct impact on how theory deals with the manner in which actors come to understand themselves as part of a collectivity, an issue taken up at length by Alberto Melucci. As Arturo Escobar argues, Melucci did not assume the existence of a relatively unified collective actor, but endeavoured to explain how such a collectivity came into being, what factors contributed to its maintenance and disintegration (Escobar, 1992: 72). Just as identities are not given, are not 'objects' for study, movements are also not "empirical phenomena" as such, but socially constructed "action systems", or "a purposive orientation which is set up within a system of opportunities and constraints" (Melucci, 1985: 793, 792). Melucci insists that we must examine not so much resources and opportunities, but "the capacity of actors to perceive, evaluate and determine the possibilities and limits afforded by the environment" (Melucci, 1988: 342). For him, this is precisely the definition of collective identity: "a shared definition of the field of opportunities and constraints offered to collective action" which must be "constructed and negotiated through a repeated process of 'activation' of social relationships connecting the actors" (Melucci, 1985: 793).

Thus, the post-Marxist theoretical project has insisted that individuals occupy a multiplicity of subject positions, and that there is no way to determine how they come to understand themselves in relation to others and the world. Identity cannot be read off structures; instead, it is a fluid, conflictual and constantly changing process occurring within discourses. Similarly, occupants of these subject positions cannot be assumed to participate in any particular mode of collective action or struggle. Rather, collective identity, like individual identity, is a social construction and the subject of constant struggle. Succinctly, post-Marxists exhort us to conceive of "collective action and identity as a process, not as a fact or an event" (Escobar, 1992: 72). The implications of these conceptualizations are manifold, some of which have been indicated in the critique of Marxist views on subjectivity, above. In this theoretical universe, there are no subjects with *a priori* consciousness determined by location, there are no 'objective interests' and thus the notion of 'false consciousness' is effectively done away with. Moreover, there is no guarantee that a conscious movement capable of utilizing the contradictions of capitalist economic and political organization to effect social transformation will arise--this is not pre-given but the result of political/ideological practices. Finally, and as was the intent of much of this theorization, there is a theoretical opening for the consideration of multiple politically relevant subjects besides class actors.

The rethinking of identity and collective action has also led directly to a reexploration of the sites of emancipatory struggle. For post-Marxists, the internalization of oppression means that the political subject itself is a terrain for struggle, wherein individuals learn to reject the dominant values which have been inscribed upon them through cultural and ideological processes. As such, the transformation of consciousness is politically central to the formation of a legitimate alternative to current structures of domination. The active struggle to expose those ideological constructs and material relationships in which those who are oppressed participate must therefore be a focal point

of any emancipatory movement. However, the matter is much more complicated than the apparent choice between "victim" and "agent of history", for, as Laclau and Mouffe point out, the form of agency which individuals choose (consciously or not) is indeterminate. Therefore, the subject is also the site of struggles over the particular identity to be adopted.

The struggle over self-definition also implies another shift in the site of politics, from the arena of the state and institutional political interactions and to "the terrain of everyday life" (Escobar, 1992: 69). Post-Marxists see domination as "exercised along a multiplicity of sites of domination and resistance" and hence the most effective challenges to existing structures are the "bringing into public view the oppression embedded in everyday life and thus challenging 'the deep-rooted codes of social interaction within civil society'" (Keane, 1988: 12 in Mahon, 1991: 126). The focus rests on 'everyday life' as it is the site of mediation where large scale processes (development, democracy) and individuals intersect. It is the site where the meanings produced by institutions and the meanings produced by individuals clash, are transformed, integrated, rejected, etc. Elizabeth Jelin explains this focus: "We believe that daily life and social movements are privileged spaces in which to study these processes of mediation, since social movements are situated, at least in theory, in the intermediate space between individualized, familiar, habitual, micro-climactic daily life, and socio-political processes writ large of the State and the institutions, solemn and superior" (Jelin, 1987b: 11 in Escobar, 1992: 70).

The question of how daily life mediates the effects of large-scale social processes is addressed by Michel de Certeau in his microsociology of popular resistance. De Certeau's thesis is that although the world is organized and dominated by economic, political, technological, institutional strategies, "the 'marginal majority' (that is, all those who have to exist within structures of domination) are nevertheless not merely passive receivers of these conditions." Rather, "people effect multiple and infinitesimal transformations of the dominant forms under which they inevitably have to live and operate in order to adapt them

to their own interests and, to the extent possible, to subject them to their own rules" (Escobar, 1992: 74). In other words, the processes of hegemonic regulation, be they economic or cultural in nature, do not produce determined effects, but are instead translated and manipulated at the local site of everyday life. If we follow the post-Marxists not only on the malleability of meaning but also on the importance of discourses in the construction and maintenance of power, then conscious intervention in the way users of cultural 'products' "reappropriate the space organized by socio-cultural production" at the local level of everyday existence is crucial for emancipatory struggle (de Certeau, 1984: xiv).

The site of everyday life is therefore, for post-Marxists, also the site of culture, or the set of people's practices (Escobar, 1992: 70). Culture in this sense is not an abstract entity defined only by beliefs, symbols, texts or artifacts, but is the way in which these elements are given meaning and "embedded in...the everyday life of people" (Escobar, 1992: 70). Since the living of daily life is the site where culture is reproduced or maintained, it is also the site where creativity and resistance can occur. Culture, which involves "language, the body, performative rituals, work, and both individual and collective identities", is the "reservoir of meanings (that is, a 'tradition')" which people use to articulate their position within the larger system, their conformity or difference (Escobar, 1992: 71). Therefore, we can see where post-Marxists hold that even "[t]o live differently, to assert one's difference, is to practice cultural innovation and to engage in some sort of political practice," and potentially, resistance (Escobar, 1992: 70).

Alain Touraine has crystallized these concepts in his notion of historicity, or "the set of cultural models that rule social practices but only through social relations that are always relations of power" (Touraine, 1988: 26). Historicity involves not values per se, but "a set of instruments, of cultural orientations, through which social practices are constituted, and thus one can say it is a set of investments" (Touraine, 1988: 41). The social movements that have arisen on the terrains of identity, everyday life and culture question not only the

content of particular social, political and economic relations, but also the control of some groups over the tools by which such relations are created, regulated and transformed. The challenge of new social movements is a more basic questioning of the "*nomination of reality*" and the power relations which shape which groups are involved in this process of definition (Melucci, 1985: 812). In other words, on the site of historicity, new social movements fundamentally question the "collective control of the processes of symbolic production" (Canel, 1992: 23).

Thus, the central theme of new social movement practice is that radical feminist axiom "the personal is political". This nostrum translates both into the idea that politics pervades all aspects of our daily lives, "so that struggles to change any aspect of our existence must be part of a broader political struggle to transform society", and the conception that change made at the level of personal or daily life is a political act (Moore and Sears, 1992: 66).

The core of many of the strategic prescriptions stemming from a reconceptualization of the locations for struggle is Gramscian in many respects, as it is underpinned by "a desire to understand how processes of hegemonic regulation work, and 'how we--collectively and individually--are implicated in maintaining the relations of power in society'" (Findlay, Cunningham and Silva, 1988: 13 in Carroll, 1992: 5). This is a call for a "transformative politics", which entails a challenge to modes of domination, as well as proposals for the construction of new social relations and new processes for the redefinition of these. However, the vision of constructing a counter-hegemonic war of position is not generalized throughout the post-Marxist paradigm. Rather, there are those who adhere to a strategy of anti-hegemony, which rejects the constructivism and will to totality that is entailed in producing new social, economic and political relations designed to replace old, 'oppressive' ones. Instead, these theorists closer to the post-modern body of work insist that constant destabilization is the only consistent manner in which to preserve

the autonomy of movements and to foster a radical political culture.

For post-Marxists closer to the Gramscian tradition, the strategic concepts of 'counter-hegemonic struggle', 'expansive hegemony', and 'war of position' still hold sway. Given that the perpetuation of the existing order was also a process at the level of culture/ideology, Gramsci developed the notion of counter-hegemony,

based upon the widespread development of a collective potential, and the building of socialism from below. This stress on debate, education and ethics is linked to Gramsci's view that revolutionary possibilities are shaped in unique ways by historical conditions. Such conditions provided not only the material circumstances of society, but also their characteristic modes of thought. (Gill and Law, 1988: 63).

Gramsci thus held that in order to effect fundamental transformation in the relations of production and reproduction, "the development of an alternative, ethical conception of society... would need to spread convincingly through the civil society" (Gill and Law, 1988: 64). This process would "imply a change in the way the masses conceived of the limits of the possible in their own lives, as well as seeing potential for a new type of society" (Gill and Law, 1988: 64).

Similarly, although with different assumptions about the agents and direction of such a project, Laclau and Mouffe assert that the creation of counter-hegemonic types of struggle are necessary. Although they reconceptualize hegemony in terms of a "radical and plural" democratic struggle (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 176) rather than struggle against capitalist domination, the mechanics of such an emancipatory project are quite similar to those in Gramsci. Counter-hegemony involves the articulation of a multiplicity of subject positions and demands "to what Gramsci called a 'hegemonic principle'" (Mouffe, 1988: 103). This principle can be one of neutralization, wherein the demands of groups are taken into account "not to transform society so as to resolve the antagonisms it expresses, but only so as to impede the extension of that demand" (Mouffe, 1988: 103). Populist and corporatist projects are those which operate under such a logic, and more often than not existing hegemonic relations are of this character. Laclau and Mouffe therefore advocate

the creation of an "expansive hegemony" characterized by a "chain of equivalences between all the democratic demands to produce the collective will of all those people struggling against subordination" linked by an "organic ideology" (Mouffe, 1988: 99). That is, the defeat of domination and full, "radical" democratization will come only when all democratic struggles are joined together by virtue of their common commitment to "the reduction of inequalities and of various forms of subordination" (Mouffe, 1988: 97). Otherwise, it is much more likely that the current state of affairs, the extension of rights often at the expense of the rights of other subordinated groups, will continue. Therefore, for Laclau and Mouffe, the political project of new social movements is the "expansion and generalization of the democratic revolution" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 166-167). In Wood's understanding, 'radical democracy' thus does not entail the rejection of liberal-democratic ideology, but rather its deepening and expansion (Wood, 1986: 19-20). The content of hegemony, in this respect, is quite different from Gramsci's. Insofar as the hegemonic principle linking diverse struggles together is to be a 'democratic' one as opposed to a 'class' one, the two visions diverge.

In what sense is it possible for the Left to appropriate liberal-democratic ideology for itself, however? As we saw earlier in Laclau's work, this is possible because there is no inherent class character to democratic discourse: "the meaning of liberal discourse is not definitively fixed; and just as this unfixedity permits their articulation with elements of conservative discourse, it also permits different forms of articulation and redefinition which accentuate the democratic moment" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 176).

Analyses leaning further towards a post-modern position say that movements are and should remain fundamentally anti-hegemonic, that is, aiming to destroy all totalizing narratives and rejecting the construction of new unitary emancipatory projects and social theories. This will to totality is characteristic of what Patton (drawing from Deleuze and Guattari) calls the state form, defined "by its apparatuses of capture" which entrap both

subjects and ideas (Patton, 1988: 127). As was discussed previously, this analysis cites Marxism as possessing a "state form of thought" which defines "the limits of the rationally acceptable and preclude[s] the possibility of different objects, let alone different styles of thought" (Patton, 1988: 128). Such an epistemological strategy leads to totalizing forms of political struggle which call for "a commitment to a unitary project of emancipation that may leave no room for the specific, limited concerns of 'marginal' social movements" (Patton, 1988: 130). Patton argues that counter-hegemony is not the only possible form of resistance, for he disagrees that change need be "mediated by the totality" (Patton, 1988: 131). Instead, politics should be a constantly mutating sea of plurality, populated by 'nomadic' individuals (be they activists or intellectuals) passing from identity to identity, movement to movement, moving piecemeal to transform oppression locally. There is a refusal "to privilege any particular agent or structure", and ultimately Patton suggests that "we should perhaps argue not for moving beyond the fragments towards the global politics of a new alliance but for multiplying the fragmentary effects of...local campaigns" (Carroll, 1992: 14; Patton, 1988: 131). Therefore, for post-modern theories of social movements, politics is as much about form as it is about content, and "[t]he metaphor of transformative politics as a "war of position," progressively shifting the balance of political and cultural forces in civil society, is supplanted by metaphors of localized guerrilla warfare and nomadic militancy" (Carroll, 1992: 14).

The post-Marxist paradigm therefore offers the following insights on the nature of resistance. The assertion of the political relevance of multiple subjectivities means that post-Marxists either demote or reject outright class actors as agents of change. For some, it is only necessary to say that class is no more potent an identity than any other, and therefore class can be one of many identities around which to organize. For others, the working class is in fact unable to become a potent revolutionary force due to its material implication in the structure of capitalist social relations, and since it cannot move beyond an

economistic form of consciousness, class is not an appropriate agent of change. This debate over the identity of agents is founded on a view of consciousness as indeterminate, and developed through discursive struggles over the meaning of self and social relations. As such, the terrain of political struggle for post-Marxists is simultaneously internal and external: the struggle over the definition of self, identity and the interpretation of meaning is as political as the wider struggle over socially/culturally defined meaning. However, it is important that resistance in the sphere of the social does not generally include the state, primarily because of the institution's implication in the structures of global capital (a remarkably neo-Marxist notion, interestingly) and therefore the ineffectiveness of any attempt to control the state on a national level. Finally, the goals and strategies of the post-Marxist paradigm are not oriented around socialism (although some concede that socialism is a necessary aspect of emancipation) but around the democratization of all spheres of life. Strategically this means waging discursive struggles against all systems of domination, which can either take the form of a counter-hegemonic movement designed to replace current social relations, or an anti-hegemonic strategy which holds that a unified project is impossible and that disruption of established understandings is the only strategy available.

Critical Evaluations of post-Marxist Praxis

As Miliband writes in his examination of what has been termed the 'new revisionism', "[i]t would be foolish to say that there are not in all this many important insights, very many necessary corrections and critiques of traditional and complacent socialist notions, and to deny that many questions which the new revisionism raises must be taken with the utmost seriousness by anyone concerned with socialist advance" (Miliband, 1985: 8). However, despite post-Marxism's forceful critique of Marxism, its invigorating and hopeful interpretation of contemporary struggles like Las Madres, and its present vogueish adoption by many self-identified socialist intellectuals, Miliband also

cautions that "neither should this be allowed to conceal all that is fundamentally wrong with what the new revisionism says or implies", be that about class, the state, or political strategy (Miliband, 1985: 8-9). There are thus several important criticisms of the paradigm that must be discussed. These assessments are both theoretical and political in nature.

Post-Marxism's characterization of the Marxist theoretical tradition is both extreme and reductionist, the effect of which is to promote the jettisoning of important structural analyses of the relations of production which shape and constrain the terrain and expression of movements. Moreover, their claims about the determinative nature of Marxism--particularly on the issue of class identity and the relationship between the economic and the political--is at best a caricature which trivializes an entire century of vigorous debate over these issues. Moreover, a rejection of the 'material' as determinant presents the possibility of conceiving identity as wholly discursive and therefore moorless. The impact of these misrepresentations is further supported by the explicit analytical focus of the level of culture and discourse, which tends to produce analyses which ignore the (possibly negligible) impact of movements on the material distribution of power and resources. In other words, there is a strategic danger in jettisoning an understanding of the way in which the economic may limit or constrain political/ideological struggles, an element which, as we shall see, is particularly pertinent in third world social formations. In terms of the analytical focus on identity and culture as sites of struggle and resistance, the relative abandonment of structural theories about the nature of capitalism and the state promotes a political voluntarism which is sanguine about the revolutionary implications of what can be superficial changes in daily practices. With respect to praxis, post-Marxism's critique of essentialist and totalizing political projects, which they base on the claim of the discursive nature of social reality, produces a political and normative relativism which makes the assessment and espousal of political projects baseless, arbitrary, and epistemologically inconsistent. The political impact of this is to open up a legitimate space for movements

and discourses which may not be 'progressive', insofar as this evaluative concept can have meaning at all within the post-Marxist paradigm.

As well, the focus on articulatory practices, ideology and discourse also raises the query of whom exactly is to be the agent of such political struggle. Although the project of radical democracy implies the extension of power to 'the people', to some extent the focus on ideological struggle implicitly puts great emphasis on the role of intellectuals and perhaps exacerbates an elitism which may be said to exist in some quarters on the Left. The focus on autonomy and fragmentation found in many works is also questionable in terms of strategic astuteness, in that fragmented, uncoordinated struggle produces the illusion of effective political action and yet is deemed by some to be favourable to the maintenance of the status quo. Finally, the relative lack of empirical work on the micro-contexts of social movements--as compared to a plethora of general theoretical statements--has contributed to the reproduction of universalist and ethnocentric assumptions about their nature, goals, and strategies, impeding the evaluation of difficulties and constraints, as well as making the theory less useful in the application to 'non-Western' movements like Las Madres. .

To begin with the issue of identity, it is clear that legions of Marxists--Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, Gramsci, and Thompson, to name a few--have recognized that class as a political agent is not an unproblematic expression of the economic. This is not to say that this view is absent from Marxist theory. As mentioned earlier, Kautsky clearly drew his notion of class from the laws of motion of capitalist development. For Kautsky, capitalist development has produced particular categories of people that share the same relationship to the means of production, and as such they share the same objective interests. However, as Geras points out, "if there have been Marxisms like it, other Marxisms have refused to be so" (Geras, 1988: 39)

Moreover, the foregoing betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the reality of

class itself. As we encountered earlier, Calderón, Piscitelli and Reyna argued that "social class is an analytical tool that makes possible the description of social structures in terms of a theoretical model. But more often than not, 'social classes' cannot be observed in the empirical realities with which the research is concerned". Instead, they assert that, when looking at real actors, "we do not see ready-made groups of classes acting organically as such. What we face, on the contrary, is the behaviour of a multiplicity of social actors around a multiplicity of "social movements" that differ in the capacity to cope with existing social conditions" (Calderón, Piscitelli and Reyna, 1992: 34). These comments clearly miss the lengthy Marxist debate over the nature of class, and do seem to note that class as analytical category is but one of at least three ways to understand class (Clement and Myles, 1994: 7). The work of E.P. Thompson on class as historical phenomenon and as relationship is notable in this regard. Thompson argues that while "[t]he class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men [sic] are born--or enter involuntarily", one must examine class consciousness, or "the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in cultural traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms" (Thompson, 1980: 9).

Similarly, Frederick Jameson, in his recent engagement with Derrida (over the latter's book, *Spectres of Marx*), asserts that the "widespread conception of class" as self-identity "is itself a kind of caricature" (Jameson, 1995: 92). Instead, he writes, "class itself is not at all this simple-minded and unmixed concept in the first place, not at all a primary building block of the most obvious as orthodox ontologies, but rather in its concrete moments something a good deal more complex, internally conflicted and reflexive than any of those stereotypes" (Jameson, 1995: 93). Miliband also argues for a conception of class as an important element through which the experience of daily life is refracted and interpreted. To argue that class is a fundamental experience "is not to fall into the 'class reductionism' with which the new revisionism so easily charges Marxists. It is rather an

instance of what might be called 'class relationism', or the insistence that class is a critical, decisive factor in 'social being' (Miliband, 1985: 9). Jameson argues similarly, asserting not only that class is an "ongoing social reality", but also an "active component of the social imaginary"; that is, as humans inevitably situated in some way vis-a-vis the relations of production, our cognitive mapping of the world involves the recognition of and the making of distinctions based on the experience of class (Jameson, 1995: 94). Just as we experience class in ways that are gendered or racialized, we also experience these other identities in class-specific ways. For Jameson, "[t]he point to be made...is not that all such class mappings are arbitrary and somehow subjective, but that they are inevitable allegorical grids through which we necessarily read the world, and also that they are structural systems in which all the elements or essential components determine each other and must be read off and defined against one another" (Jameson, 1995: 94).⁵

The rejection of the working class as an effective political agent by post-Marxists also betrays a misreading of the difficulties of class struggle. Even though, as the discussion above reveals, the issue of unity is one of crucial importance for political effectiveness, this in itself would not necessarily result in a revolutionary moment. The robustness of the structures of domination--and the ability of those whose interests lie with their maintenance to mobilize massive power resources to defend them--must also be understood, not only as an impediment to socialist transformation, but to social change in general. Miliband explains why pessimism directed specifically at the working class is somewhat misplaced:

The new revisionism consistently underestimates or even ignores the fact that the kind of change implied by the notion of socialism is a very arduous enterprise, not only because the working class may not support it, but because even if they did the dominant class is

⁵ Interestingly, this is not a specifically Marxist view. As we saw in Chapter 1, those writing post colonial feminist criticisms of Western feminism make this point as well: women experience gender through their simultaneous situatedness in class relations, which are also likely racialized (Mohanthy, 1991, Lugones and Spelman, 1983; hooks, 1984)

against it and would be even if the working class were fervently for it. The 'dominant class' is not a figure of speech: it denotes a very real and formidable concentration of power... The new revisionism does not seem to me to take this power seriously enough: most of the relevant literature is remarkably short on the factual acknowledgement and analysis of its nature and meaning, and its implications for a realistic socialist strategy (Miliband, 1985: 15).

This brings us to question more generally the post-Marxist conception of the relationship between the economic and the political. Wood argues that the post-Marxist argument that the social is discursively constructed, and subsequently that the socialist project can be built through ideological means and need (or should) not be based solely on the interests of workers, results in an autonomization of the political from the economic or material. The positing of a entirely contingent relationship between the material and the political means, Wood contends, that "there are no such things as material interests but only discursively constructed *ideas* about them" (Wood, 1986: 61). Wherein many Marxists have recognized that there are and must be mediations between the raw experience of capitalist exploitation and socialist political projects, Wood sees Laclau and Mouffe going far beyond the notion of mediation.⁶ The counterposition of complete determinacy and absolute contingency as the sole ontological choices available for explaining social events sees Laclau and Mouffe come down on the side of indeterminacy (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 84). However, the insistence on contingency "is very different from simply acknowledging that material interests do not spontaneously translate themselves into political objectives, and even less into concerted political action. It implies that material

⁶ In fact, Laclau and Mouffe explicitly reject any possibility of the notion of mediation as being consistent with a theory of structural determination, based on their *definition* of determination such that "the structural framework constituted by the basic determinations of society also explains not only the limits of autonomy but also the nature of the autonomous entity". As this notion of determination makes any concept of meditation or relative autonomy superfluous--seeing the impossibility of autonomy in the face of complete structural determination one must therefore choose contingency, in which the degree of autonomy or subordination is "the result of precise articulatory practices" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 140). It is this notion of determination that both Geras and Wood strenuously object to as unsupported by argumentation and, in their view, constituting a deep misunderstanding of the relationship between the material and the political (see Wood, 1986: 60-62; Geras, 1987: 48-50; Geras, 1988: 26-29)

interests do not exist unless they are translated into political objectives and concerted political action" (Wood, 1986: 61) As Wood points out, the results of this line of thinking are that

the worker is no more affected by capitalist exploitation than are any other human beings who are not themselves the direct object of exploitation. This also implies that capitalists derive no fundamental advantage from their exploitation of workers, that the workers derive no fundamental disadvantage from their exploitation by capital, that workers would derive no fundamental advantage from ceasing to be exploited, that the condition of being exploited does not entail an 'interest' in the cessation of class exploitation, that the relations between labour and capital have no fundamental consequences for the whole structure of social and political power, and that the conflicting interests between capital and labour are all in the eye of the beholder (Wood, 1986: 61).

Laclau and Mouffe's rejection of there being "no theoretical basis whatsoever" for the existence of 'objective interests', instead constituting "little more than an arbitrary attribution of interests, by the analyst, to certain category of social agents", amounts to a denial of the existence of knowledge emerging out of actually experienced reality. In response to this rejection of objective interests of the working class, Miliband responds that the notion does not arise from

the attribution of an arbitrarily privileged role [for the working class in the struggle for socialism] dreamt up by intellectual impresarios and rejected by the working class itself. It is rather that it is the working class, male and female, black and white, employed and unemployed, young and old, which experiences most acutely (even if unequally) the contradictions, constraints and oppressions of capitalism and this produces in the working class demands born of felt needs (Miliband, 1985: 12-13)

In light of this rejection of the possibility of objective interests, Wood repeatedly remarks throughout her book that the logical extension of this position supports a claim that a capitalist is as likely to be a socialist as a wage worker, and that one's position in relations of production is not determinant (Wood, 1986: 61). Ultimately, the detachment of the political/ideological from any relation to the economy or the social effected by post-Marxism leads to "a randomization of history" in which all political struggle, all historical change is the result of pure contingency (Wood, 1986: 76).

The "relegation of material production to at best a secondary role in the constitution

of social life" (Wood, 1986: 5) in the post-Marxist paradigm gives rise to a number of questions about what the appropriate strategies and goals for emancipatory projects could be. Perhaps most unsettling is the distinct and troubling relativism which emerges from Laclau and Mouffe's critique of essentialism, and indeed from any analysis which so completely rejects any basis for universal values not constructed by discourse. I do not necessarily disagree with their analysis that all meaning--all values, all criteria for goals like 'Progress' and 'Justice'--is discursively constructed and therefore historically and culturally contingent. However, as Geras importantly interrogates, where in post-Marxism is there "a basis for any *particular* political direction or orientation?" (Geras, 1987: 75) He points out that although Laclau and Mouffe subscribe to the practice and realization of a 'progressive' politics, their critique of the epistemological foundations of the Marxist (and modern) tradition have left them without recourse to any of the standard indices of progress--objective interests, an appeal to human nature, or reference to transhistorical notions of justice--nor have they provided an alternative basis (Geras, 1987: 75). Geras argues that Laclau and Mouffe's reference to 'subordination' and 'oppression' do not help us choose, as their definitions allow that it is the *perception of oppression* in situations of subordination that creates antagonism and resistance, not the reality of subordination itself (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 152; Geras, 1987: 76-77). This, as Geras points out, "completely relativizes what counts as oppression" so that even those who hold power may now construct discourses which claim that they, too, are oppressed (Geras, 1987: 77; Harding, 1986: 657). ⁷ Such a tactic would not be so regressive if there were some way to expose it, but, if we follow Laclau and Mouffe (and post-modern theory more generally),

⁷ Examples of this abound in the current period: claims of reverse discrimination on the part of white males, the cries of 'political correctness' and 'totalitarianism' levelled by members of the traditional power holding sectors, the protests of capitalists who are at the behest of too-powerful unions and the state... Clearly, the focus on indeterminacy and historicity, while perhaps not incorrect, has already given subordinating groups a political language in which to express their demands which is difficult to combat without encountering self contradiction.

there is no possibility of referring to any evaluative mechanism, effectively leaving a 'normative vacuum'. Although Laclau and Mouffe do refer to unjust relations which are to be struggled against, Geras argues that "their definitions and examples of subordination and oppression trade on unspoken assumptions concerning illicit power or inequalities which are unjust, 'brutal' or unacceptable in some other way. Illicit, unjust, brutal or unacceptable, however, according to what standard?" (Geras, 1987: 77)

Laclau and Mouffe respond by saying that while there is no way to "decide with apodictic certainty that one type of society is better than another", they retain the "possibility of reasoning politically and of preferring, for a variety of reasons, certain political positions to others". They claim that their theoretical position does not condemn them to political nihilism, "since one can reason about the *verisimilitude* of the available alternatives" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1987: 102). They go on to defend this epistemological stance by arguing that "an argument which tries to found itself on the verisimilitude of its conclusions is essentially pluralist, because it needs to make reference to other arguments and, since the process is essentially open, these can always be contested and refuted" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1987: 102). But this is no answer. Geras' argument was clearly not that Laclau and Mouffe had tread the path of nihilism, but that their political positions refer to standards of 'progress' which they have undermined in their critique of Marxist praxis. Therefore, their political choices are arbitrary, and the bases for 'political reason' and 'verisimilitude' go unarticulated and unexamined. Moreover, it remains to be seen on what basis can the verisimilitude of their position be assessed or challenged. Geras charges these unfounded political choices as being profoundly undemocratic, in the sense that, by "overtly denying that there is any being-as-such, any in-itself, in terms of which competing discourses might be adjudicated", Laclau and Mouffe "'democratically' cut everyone off from access to what could meaningfully be called either truth or objectivity" (Geras, 1988: 59). Therefore, although Laclau and Mouffe claim to have avoided creating a discourse

ignorant "of the conditions of its own discursivity" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 2), evidently this is not entirely so.

It is not only the shift away from meta-social or universal principles which discourse theory implies that is problematic. The shift of terrain which accompanies the pluralization of politically relevant spaces and identities has prompted many to caution that an overly voluntarist politics may emerge. Melucci himself is ambivalent about the assumed emancipatory potential of new social movements. He cautions that each window of opportunity for the redefinition of relationships is also full of possibilities for new forms of repression, and that attention must be paid to the context in which concepts such as democracy, health, love and power are being redefined. Melucci makes sure to point out that overly voluntarist approaches to emancipation are doomed to fail; for example, when speaking about the politicization of the body as a tool for individual emancipation, Melucci emphasizes that it is also an instrument for social control, and that an awareness that needs must be met within the limits of social existence is crucial.

Any body politics aimed at emancipation must inevitably fall within this dialectic. It must facilitate a return to the body of needs and impulses, but it must also help individuals locate themselves within the constraints of their social existence. It cannot but express the tension between full 'liberation' and total 'repression' and thus, between the discovery of limits and the search for the possible (Melucci, 1989, 124-125).

Thus, for Melucci, there is no inherently progressive tendency in contemporary social movements, and no guarantee of their effectiveness.

The issue of voluntarist politics being encouraged by the focus on the site of culture is also problematic for Colin Mooers and Alan Sears, for it often calls for strategies that "work around, but do not challenge, state power." For them, the focus on identity and the right to difference (instead of equality) ignores the problem of the ways in which our right to be different is circumscribed by existing social relations. They elaborate by saying that "the state, for example, plays a crucial role in defining the limits of difference, fostering undifferentiated identities... while punishing deviation from legally derived norms. Yet the

politics of difference does not have a strategy to challenge the state power. Instead it engages in affirmation" (Mooers and Sears, 1992: 67). Although the case may be overstated here, Mooers and Sears point to an overly voluntarist aspect of new social movement political practice; in fact, they feel that micropolitics is in fact symptomatic of the lowered political horizons of new social movements which take the context of self-transformation as essentially given.

The exclusive focus on civil society as the only arena for social movements is purported to rob them of their 'political' content. This sets up false dichotomies between "state" and "civil society" which are unrealistic, and do not reflect the practice of movements in both the North and the South. This binary opposition prevents the exploration of "the connection between civil society and the state, and between social movements and political reform. Thus, new social movement theory cannot explain the processes and the mechanisms that intervene in the institutionalization (or the absence of institutionalization) of the new values and social practices that new social movements are said to be developing within civil society" (Canel, 1992: 37). One cannot automatically cry "cooptation" as an explanation for that adoption of social movement values.

There is often little analysis of strategic questions in this literature, in that it rarely elaborates what the actual praxis of resistance is for these movements. It "does not integrate into its analysis the strategic-instrumental dimension of social action--the processes by which individuals and groups make decisions, develop strategies, and mobilize resources. The emphasis on identity comes at the expense of considering strategic questions" (Canel, 1992: 35). "Social movements are left--by definition--without any instrumental or political dimension" (Canel, 1992: 36). Boggs explains this lack of strategic acuity with both the paradigm's and the movements' youth: "a post-Marxist paradigm is emergent insofar as its development is partial, limited, and fragmentary, its theoretical basis is weak, and its efforts to achieve strategic articulation are embryonic (and

often futile). This predicament... is natural enough given the unformed and fluid character of new movements" (Boggs, 1986: xi). Boggs goes further and admits readily that the strategic choices of movements have often "been largely partial and even contradictory, to the extent, in some instances, of closing off rather than enlarging space for the diffusion of local movements", a dialectic which emerges out of the attempt to balance the movements' radical and autonomous nature while attempting to deal with the practicalities of gaining political influence over established institutions (Boggs, 1986: xi).

Perhaps even more foreboding is L. A. Kauffman's concern, which emphasizes the potential for identity-politics to devolve into an "antipolitics" which mirrors the ideology of the capitalist market place through emphasis on lifestyle and lack of collective organization. (Kauffman, 1990: 78; quoted in Carroll, 1992: 8). "She calls instead for an approach which balances concerns about identity 'with an emphasis on solidarity, as well as attention to other key categories like interests and needs'" (Kauffman, 1990: 79; quoted in Carroll, 1992: 8). Thus, new social movements may have a depoliticizing effect in that their foci and praxis may not actually challenge prevailing power structures, leaving domination relatively intact. Instead, they give the appearance of action, which in its voluntarism does not see the structural constraints which gird agency.

This criticism applies all the more to anti-hegemonic approaches to praxis. In this regard, Belden Fields asks:

What does it mean to argue for a purely local action and strategy in this world so far apart from a homogenous, aboriginal community? It means the opposite of putting things together, the opposite of understanding how oppressions relate to and reinforce each other. It not only means difference, for one can accommodate difference with a notion of mediation. No, it also means fragmentation. To whom is fragmentation of the oppressed useful? (Fields, 1988: 154)

In addition to the reductionist account of Marxism, post-Marxism as a paradigm suffers from a lack of empirical work studying the dynamics of actual movements. Although with the growth in its influence, empirical application of post-Marxism has

increased, "[m]ost new social movement theorists have concentrated on developing general theoretical postulates on new social movements but have neglected the microcontexts in which these movements operate" (Canel, 1992: 38). The lack of empirical work has contributed to the reproduction of universalist assumptions about the nature of movements. This lacuna has more often than not taken on ethnocentric dimensions, as the empirical work that has been done has concentrated on the conditions prevailing in Europe and North America.⁸ But ethnocentrism, as discussed in Chapter 1, is not only a matter of silences; the representation of the Third World in post-Marxist theory is also questionable. Calderon, Piscitelli and Reyna ask whether or not there is something about social movements in Latin America which remains

impervious to the analytical categories provided by European analysts, despite their richness. In spite of their caution, most of these analysts still fall prey to teleological and rationalistic biases, according to which certain inevitable fates await the movements consequently, they easily overlook the will and direction of the changes prescribed by Latin American societies themselves (Calderon, Piscitelli and Reyna, 1992: 34)

For example, Laclau and Mouffe make specific reference to the "third world difference" when it comes to the development of collective identities and a hegemonic form of politics. They say that, as opposed to advanced industrial countries which are characterized by decentralized modes of domination,

in the countries of the Third World, imperialist exploitation and the predominance of brutal and centralized forms of domination tend from the beginning to endow the popular struggle with a center, with a single and clearly defined element. Here the division of the political space into two fields is present from the outset, but the diversity of democratic struggles is more reduced (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 131)

This, however, smacks of the theoretical universalism and construction of the 'Other' that has been roundly criticized in this paradigm. Escobar responds by saying that

⁸ This lack of micro-sociological study in Latin America has begun to be addressed. Escobar asserts that "[m]ore clearly in Latin America than elsewhere, the move towards a grand 'theory of social movements' is being actively resisted" (Escobar, 1992: 63). The specificity and diversity of experiences there has thus precipitated 'mutations' in post-Marxist theories, which is typical of the fate of European theory when applied to the Latin American context. See Alvarez and Escobar, eds., 1992, Calderon, 1986, Jelin, ed., 1987 and 1990 for applications.

[t]he notion of threshold [across which developed countries have moved], let it be noted, implies some sort of evolution, and this teleology and rationalism almost inevitably is accompanied by a certain degree of Eurocentrism. Here again, the Third World is represented as having a different type of historical agency, somewhat reduced in relation to that of European society. But is this so?... True, there are some demands that can be universalized, such as the demand to democratize the state, family, local community, and so on... Yet, even these demands are understood and experienced in very different ways by the various social actors. The 'center' of the popular struggles that Laclau and Mouffe refer to is by no means self-evident (Escobar, 1992: 79).

Furthermore, the notion that social movements are not based upon material interests is perhaps false both in the North and the South. As I have interrogated earlier, what is the definition of material? Are we to understand that the material has only to do with wages or production? If so, then what of consumption? And do not many identities based on "non-material" values have some material component?

There are many important cautions we should draw from this discussion of the problems with post-Marxist theory. It is clear that much of post-Marxism's critique of Marxism, and their claims to novel theorizing spring from a profound misunderstanding of many elements of Marxist theory. Post-Marxists, particularly Laclau and Mouffe, do not seem to recognize the complexity and nuance of Marxist debate, and lay claim to many insights which have long been discussed by Marxists. Exemplary are the debates on consciousness, a determinate theory of which countless Marxists have rejected; the debates over the meaning of class, which many have treated as a process, a set of social relations and an interpretive map for the understanding of lived experience, rather than as a reified object with fully formed consciousness and revolutionary capacity; and the debate over the nature of the relationship between the economic and the political, which involves mediation and relative autonomy for many Marxists rather than stark determination by the economic of all aspects of political, cultural and ideological relations. In general, then, the post-Marxist critique of Marxism is based on an understanding of extremes and leads to choice of one of these extremes, contingency. Moreover, the reluctance to examine material relations of power presents some strategic difficulties for post-Marxists, who may not have

the tools to assess the nature and durability of power structures and therefore fall into a voluntarist sense of the possibilities for social change. Moreover, in the face of a deep distrust of "material interests", post-Marxists have little more than personal taste to base their political choices on, an orientation which tends toward relativism and the inability to evaluate competing claims. Finally, the lack of empirical work on the way the movements actually function leaves post-Marxist theory somewhat disconnected from reality, and leaves observers with little basis for evaluating their theoretical claims.

Marxism, Post-Marxism, and Theorizing Las Madres

What does the Marxist/post-Marxist debate mean for our analysis of praxis and, more specifically, of Las Madres as a distinct collective identity emerging out of the conditions of the Argentine political economy of the late 1970s? Is there anything more than rubble once the dust of the polemic clears? I would like to argue that there is in fact the possibility of reconstructing Marxism, a reconstruction which both addresses the important questions raised by post-Marxist theorizing, and yet retains (epistemologically and ontologically) a notion of structure. What this entails is a position which does not accept the majority of post-Marxist characterizations of the Marxist tradition, and rejects the stark choice seemingly presented between class identity and other identities, the state and civil society, economy and culture, material and discursive. I want to argue that it is important to explore the post-Marxist theorizations of these concepts, but also that we must examine where in the history of Marxist thought these concepts and issues have been addressed and whether there are openings in Marxism where we could incorporate such ideas. To forget the theoretical power of Marxism is to relinquish any notion of structure, of the limitations which dominant institutions and ideas place on emancipatory struggles. An acceptance of the notion that "all is possible" which is implied in much post-Marxist theory will perhaps make us more hopeful, but it will not make us wiser as theorists or

activists.

On the issue of identity, identity formation, consciousness and multiple subjectivity, I have attempted to show that there is more common ground between Marxists and post-Marxists than commonly believed. It is important to recognize that the notion of identity/consciousness as the result of a process of political struggle is present in Marxist theorizations as well as post-Marxist ones. What we can take from each is this process consists both of the feelings generated by actual lived experience as well as the debates over the meaning of that experience. What is theoretically important to trace, as I will do in Chapters 4 and 5, are the material and discursive events, processes and strategies which have led to the development of a particular kind of identity, a particular interpretation of reality. I will ask: what lived experiences contributed to the formation of a critical perspective on the junta by the Mothers? What state practices and what self-generated actions contributed to this consciousness? What specific understandings of the field of political action--of the state, of the capitalist economy, of other political actors, and of their own capacity for political agency--did Las Madres' develop out of these experiences? What previously existing identities or self-understandings--particularly in terms of class and gender--affect Las Madres? What impact did symbolic images have on this process? Finally, what have been the implications of the set of understandings (of self and social relations) developed by Las Madres? In what ways have this consciousness helped them to reveal the oppressive nature of state and social power, and how has it hindered them in terms of achieving their political goals? This set of questions seems to me to be pertinent in the context of both Marxism and post-Marxism, and they address themselves to understanding the actual process of consciousness and identity formation, in all its contradiction and ambiguity. What I take from the post-Marxist/Marxist exchange on the issue of identity is therefore the notion that the process must be examined in order to explain the outcome, and this set of questions attempts to understand that process.

It is important to note that the reaction of most Marxists to Las Madres, both intellectuals and activists within and without Argentina, has ranged from minor recognition to open hostility. Many Marxist analyses of the Argentine *Proceso* have focused on its politico-economic aspects: the anti-labour nature of monetarist economic policies and the class nature of the dictatorship. Frequently there is little or no discussion of Las Madres as a force in the overthrow of the dictatorship; occasionally there is reference made to the "ethical component" to resistance provided by human rights organizations, but rarely an in-depth examination of the strategic-political activities and coalition building of autonomous, non-institutionalized groups like Las Madres. Typical in this regard is the work of Ronaldo Munck, who, in the final analysis, directs his congratulations to the labour movement in Argentina, saying that the organized trade union movement has been the "backbone of popular resistance" to the military project (Munck, 1989: 89). He argues that due to the organic nature of Argentina's labour movement, which was well rooted in both the workplace and the working class community and possessed a "representative but bureaucratic leadership", the trade unions were able to mount effective resistance to the dictatorship in the form of general strikes in 1979, 1982, and 1983 (Munck, 1989: 87). This was despite the severe disarticulation and repression suffered by the movement in the early days of the *Proceso*, where undoubtedly trade unions were primary targets for intelligence units responsible for ending 'internal subversion'. Munck does indicate that the human rights movements played a "major role" in challenging the legitimacy of military rule, but does not provide information on concrete strategies or on how these movements articulated their struggles with other (labour) movements (Munck, 1989: 91). Instead he is content to make general statements about the 'nature' of the movement--defensive and reactive by definition and conception--and about social movements in general as site- and issue-specific resistances which may articulate a symbolic challenge to the entire system, but can be easily coopted, manipulated and defused (Munck, 1989: 90).

The absence of detailed analyses is certainly unsatisfying in terms of appreciating the concrete nature of Las Madres' contribution to popular resistance, but is surpassed in its narrowness by those hostile rejections of Las Madres for failing to articulate a class-based discourse on the policies of the dictatorship. Critics primarily from the Argentine labour movement have rejected Las Madres' discourse of life and the identification of the *desaparecidos* as 'children' rather than 'militants' or 'socialists' as denigrating the memory of their activist children and missing the central component of the *Proceso*: its attempt to discipline and control the working class. Although there is little doubt that this analysis of the dictatorship is correct (as will be shown in Chapter 3), the rejection of an alternative discourse out of hand without evaluating its possible strategic benefits is orthodoxy in action.

This attitude toward Las Madres is a serious impediment to understanding not only their movement but the nature of resistance in the late 20th century as well. However, it is not clear to me that such a position is the only one that can be derived out of a reading of Marxist theory. It is certainly the case that the politics practiced by certain Marxists has often been problematic in terms of accepting gendered struggles as autonomous in some way from the class struggle, and it has been a common refrain heard by feminists that by focusing on the division between men and women they were unnecessarily dividing the working-class struggle. However, if we are to take Gramsci seriously and understand the counter-hegemonic struggle (be that in terms of a party or a coalition movement) as one which *prefigures* the social relations of the future society, then there is certainly room and need for the simultaneous working out of those things which divide us. One should always be quite careful not to ascribe the problems of practice to the "inherent" limitations of theory.

On the other hand, Las Madres is precisely one of those social movements that post-Marxists have attempted to make theoretical space for. The panoply of journalistic and

academic accounts of Las Madres frequently took an implicitly post-Marxist position on their activities, evident in the focus on their status as new political subjects, struggling to redefine their role at the level of social and political relations, and challenging not only the policies of the state vis-à-vis *los desaparecidos*, but also the fundamental logic, role and values of the state, the military, and institutions of representation (be they parties, legislatures, the media, revolutionary organizations and the church). The vast majority of these accounts (Fisher, 1989; Fisher, 1993; Bouvard, 1994; Bousquet, 1982) are extremely valuable, as they rely heavily on interviews with the Mothers and chart the Mothers' own understandings of their process of consciousness formation, the reasons behind certain political strategies and their understanding of social life in general. However, the major flaw of these accounts is that they fail to investigate why it was that the Mothers' movement met with such difficulty in the latter part of the 1980s. None of these provide an integrated analysis of the movement and the political and economic events which occurred during the period of democratic consolidation, and are primarily descriptive in their content. It is this gap in understanding the effect that the social context/social structure had on the movement that I attempt to fill.

What this means is that I will take seriously Miliband's injunction to understand the nature and impact of the power of the dominant class, and the institutions associated with it such as the state and the military. In this sense I accept the Marxist notion that there is something fundamental about the way societies organize themselves in order to satisfy human need. Chapter 3 is therefore based on the following questions: what is the configuration of class relations in Argentina and how have they been important politically? How have class relations and class struggles affected political institutions and political culture? What are those autonomous aspects to politics which have had effects on political outcomes? What effect have the economic and political structures in Argentina had on the possibilities for emancipatory struggle? However, this is a chapter which also takes the

post-Marxist emphasis on the symbolic and the discursive seriously. In other words, it is important to explore the implications of meanings that people and collectivities (variously situated) have given to these economic and political processes, and to understand how these meanings have given rise to certain (and not other) political responses. This theme of the symbolic and the struggle over meaning and the interpretation of history will also be a key feature in Chapter 4 and 5, where I will look at the impact of the Mothers' use of image and attempts to expose other meanings which challenged the unitary interpretation of events given by the junta. In contrast to post-Marxist theory, then, it will become clear that social reality and social structures are understood by the collective agents in question to entail both material and discursive aspects, and their strategies reflect this.

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Chapter 3: Argentine Political Economy and the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*

One of the key theoretical contentions to be drawn from Chapter 2 is that political, economic and social relations fundamentally affect the possibilities for organizing resistance, providing both openings for and limitations on the emergence of new forms and strategies of struggle. In other words, it is impossible to understand fully the importance and effectiveness of new identities and political strategies for resistance without examining the context of that struggle and the way in which they both provide possibilities and constraints on challenges to prevailing relations of power. It is here, therefore, that Marxist theorizations regarding the power of capital and its relationship to the state are extremely pertinent. However, it is not sufficient to posit the existence of these processes; rather, it is the task of this chapter to demonstrate that these contentions are not only empirically true but also politically relevant in the case of Argentina. As such, the structures and processes of the Argentinian political economy in the late 1970s are crucial to our understanding of the emergence, nature, and ultimate fate of Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo as a new political agent. It is important to note, in the context of the Marxist/post-Marxist debate of the last chapter, that Argentina in the 1970s--for both historically specific and globally applicable reasons--produced a context in which organizing resistance around working-class concerns became impossible. Indeed, a political project was constructed out of conditions of unmediated social conflict which sought to destroy the bases for all collective identities not determined/shaped by the state and to produce atomized individuals who would submit to the authority of tradition and the market. This chapter is primarily concerned with charting out the parameters of this class war in its economic, political and ideological forms, and with demonstrating how the activities of the military and agrarian capital sharply circumscribed the space for organizing around issues of capitalist production. However, we must recognize that the state did not completely extinguish all resistance, and in fact the

contradictions of the process of economic, political and ideological restructuring produced openings for new forms of collective identity which became politically salient during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

It is also important to incorporate post-Marxist insights into this analysis as well, particularly with regards to the impact of non-class relations of domination on this field of political action. Moreover, as mentioned above, the ideological, symbolic or discursive level is also very important when attempting to understand how it was that so many Argentines came to accept the *Proceso* as legitimate in some way. In other words, the symbolic dimension of Argentine political life and culture, as well as the junta's ability to manipulate socially potent images of security and disorder, national pride, and most importantly the intimate relationships between gendered individuals at the level of the family, came to have enormous impact on the ability of Las Madres to capture a constituency and present alternative interpretations of the reality of Argentine political life in the late 1970s and early 80s.

This chapter is therefore an exploration of those political-economic and ideological processes which altered the context for resistance in 1970s Argentina. This examination will focus simultaneously on several levels:

- 1) Firstly, we will examine the construction of social forces and their interests, as well as their relative institutionalization in the state, the military, political parties and working-class organizations. This process of increasing class conflict and the inability of political institutions to mediate them began in the early part of the century, which became the basis for the economic and political instability of the pre-*Proceso* period. The period of domestic strife in question was not only the result of extended intra- and inter-class struggle which had led to a situation of virtual chaos, but also a function of international economic instability in the form of high inflation, unstable financial markets, and changes in the international regime of accumulation. This process intensified with the return of Perón in

1973, who was unable, as he had in the first Peronist period, to mediate effectively this class conflict. In this context, the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* can be seen as a political-economic project to restore stable conditions for capitalist accumulation in Argentina. This is evident not only in the project of economic restructuring which distributed economic and political resources from the working class and industrial capital to agrarian sectors, but also in the direct targeting of leftist working-class organizations and their supporters for repression.

2) The dictatorship did not only frame its economic and political intervention in terms of the desire to restore the conditions for profitability in the Argentinian economy. The *Proceso* also articulated a discursive/ideological line which emphasized the need to protect traditional morality and 'Western civilization' from the (broadly defined) threat of 'subversion'. As such, the junta and its allies in agrarian capital and the Catholic Church mounted an attack on those ideological trends identified with modern and secular morality, particularly (but not only) feminism. As such, the *Proceso* was in part held together by a shared vision of traditional social relations based on submission to authority, the role of the family as the fundamental unit of sociability, and the place of women as the moral foundation of the nation. Insofar as this discursive project played on traditional notions of femininity, we can begin to understand the reasons why it was mothers, standing at the nexus of contradictions between ideological and material practices, who began to resist the regime.

We will therefore explore how the *Proceso* profoundly restricted the political and cultural space for emancipatory projects through the rapid institution of the free market, the redistribution of economic power and resources to the agro-export and financial sectors and away from the industrial working class, the 'removal' of the state from 'intervention' in the economy, and extreme political and cultural repression in the form of disappearances, secret detention, torture and murder, and the active destruction of all forms of sociability

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outside of the family. We shall see that in this context of restricted political and ideological space, previously apolitical sectors such as Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo emerged to become the ethical vanguard of opposition against the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*. This chapter will therefore allow us to understand the bases for the growing politicization of this new collective actor, as well as the social forces which came to pose constraints on the achievement of the goals of Las Madres during the transition to democracy.

Social Forces and Institutions in 20th Century Argentina: The Foundations of Conflict

The turbulent events of the mid-1970s clearly constitute the immediate conditions out of which the material and discursive project of dictatorship emerged in 1976. These conditions were characterized by economic and political instability, which produced a situation of increasing ideological polarization and radicalization of the left and right. However, the struggles of the 1970s must also be seen in light of the processes of economic, political and social change which occurred in Argentina throughout the course of the 20th century. Therefore, in order to understand the advent of the *Proceso*, we must briefly examine the long-standing conflict between the classes associated with two divergent modes of development: the agro-export versus the domestic industrial. Further to this, it is crucial to understand how Peronism in the 1940s intervened in this antagonism and sought the development of Argentine industrial capacity at the expense of agrarian capital. The form of state and the pattern of civil-military relations which emerged from this struggle was such that formal conflict resolution was seen as neither legitimate nor effective, with the result that by the 1970s, extra-institutional politics were both dominant and out of control. Finally, in addition to examining material interests and the institutions which grew out of them, attention must be given to what was conceived of in Argentinian political culture as the struggle between tradition and modernity. As we shall see, in

addition to a particular form of economic organization, the family and the role of women was an important element in the definition of the 'modern' and the 'traditional', and the feminist movement in Argentina was in particular conceived of as anti-traditional by conservative sectors such as the Church and the military. As such, the conflict between modernity and tradition provided an important discursive and material component to the social/cultural reconstruction of Argentine life embarked upon by the *Proceso*.

The framework for the polarization of the 1970s was therefore in part the nature of class/social structure in Argentina. From the 19th century onward, the dominant component in the Argentine economy was the agro-export sector controlled by a small landowning class with intimate ties to foreign capital and markets.¹ Wynia characterizes these agrarian capitalists as "private minded", in that they were extremely reticent to engage in a redistribution of their wealth for the purposes of financing immigration, building infrastructure and other such public goods. Not only did this attitude inhibit the redistribution of income in Argentina from early on, it also led to the reliance on foreign capital to finance large infrastructural projects such as road and railway development and prevented the development of other sources of wealth such as heavy industry (Wynia, 1986: 31, 33).² Therefore, until the 1930s, the agrarian elite resisted any alteration in their social and economic status, ensuring that "[e]verything depended upon the pampas and its production, and other possible modes of development were either ignored or subordinated

¹ By 1914, 8% of the families which owned land in the pampas held 80% of it, the result of the campaign (the so-called Conquest of the Desert in 1879-80) to confiscate land from the indigenous peoples through their extermination at the hands of the army, under the command of future president General Julio A. Roca (Burns, 1980: 32-33). Not only was economic power extremely concentrated, but there was from this time the tendency to use the publicly funded institution of the army for the disciplining or elimination of elements posing a threat to the economic interests of the landed oligarchy.

² An illustration of the heavy involvement of foreign--specifically British--capital in the Argentine economy is the fact that, thanks to British investment, the railways grew from 6,500 kms of track in 1889 to 31,100 by 1914. Furthermore, by the 1920s, the four cereal companies as well as the five meat packers were predominantly foreign owned (Wynia, 1986: 34, 36). See also Peralta-Ramos, 1992: 17.

to it" (Wynia, 1986: 33).

However, the world depressions of 1890 and the 1930s, as well as the two World Wars, exposed the particular vulnerability of the Argentine mode of development, with its dependence both upon agriculture as the main source of wealth as well as upon foreign rather than domestic consumption. Because the oligarchy's immense wealth had heretofore cushioned them from the full effects of instabilities in international markets, structural changes to Argentina's economy were deemed unnecessary until the 1930s, when fluctuations in the domestic and world economies became too great to ignore. The severity of the Great Depression in 1929 presented a great shock to the Argentine economy "because of their heavy reliance on foreign markets and suppliers of industrial goods for their sustenance" (Wynia, 1986: 36-7). A new pragmatism characterized the economic policies of the oligarchy, and a relaxation of their previously rigid adherence to free trade doctrines allowed the increased regulation of prices, import tariffs and foreign exchange markets by the state, perhaps a reflection of the desperation of agrarian capital (Wynia, 1986: 37; Peralta-Ramos, 1992: 11).

The experience of the 1930s subsequently enhanced the status of industry within the Argentine economy, as it became evident that agro-exports no longer provided a stable basis for the generation of national wealth. As Peralta-Ramos argues, "this crisis generated the necessary structural conditions for the formation of a class alliance favourable to industrialization" (Peralta-Ramos, 1992: 20). Thus, the industrial sector's share of GNP grew from 20 % in 1920 to 28% in 1940, more than the share provided by agriculture (Wynia, 1986: 52). Even though the landed oligarchy remained hostile to industrialization, the precarious state of agriculture in Argentina at this conjuncture forced landed interests to tolerate industry and the consequences of losing absolute dominance over the national economy. However, by the 1940s, the debate over the appropriate source of accumulation had resurfaced in full force.

In the 1940s, Argentina was faced with the choice of "limpl[ing] along, mixing a little more industrialization with continued reliance on the export economy, or devot[ing] far more public and private resources to industrialization" in order to increase economic independence (Wynia, 1986: 38). Partisan wrangling stalled state-sponsored industrialization efforts until a "new generation of officers who were convinced that the oligarchy was losing touch with wartime realities took it upon themselves to prepare Argentina for its uncertain future, starting with the seizure of power in 1943" (Wynia, 1986: 38). The subsequent shift to industry as the leading sector of the economy greatly affected the political and social power of agrarian capital, and set up an antagonism between these two sectors which was to be played out repeatedly throughout the subsequent three decades. Moreover, and perhaps more threatening, industrialization also led to the growth of an urban industrial working class, whose size, increasing unionization, and politicization was of increasing concern to established centres of power (Peralta-Ramos, 1992: 24).

Nationalist officers within the military seized power in 1943 not only to put Argentina on a new and more prosperous economic path, but also "to prevent [the working class'] radicalization by socialist and anarchist intellectuals and labor leaders who led the attack against capitalism", a problem seen as "far beyond the capacity of the lethargic oligarchy to solve" (Wynia, 1986: 52). It was from within this project that Juan Perón emerged with a populist resolution to inter-class conflict. Perón was "determined to win the allegiance of organized labor and use it to the state's advantage", so that "the government would become the patron rather than the oppressor of a compliant working class that had discarded its revolutionary ambitions in exchange for a host of new economic and political privileges" (Wynia, 1986: 52). The alliance between the state under Perón and the working classes became institutionalized in the form of import substitution industrialization policies, as well as through the extension of welfare state provisions and large increases in real wages (Peralta-Ramos, 1992: 30-31). The use of the working class

to establish a social base for industrialization ultimately meant that industrial development would have to be "channelled through the domestic market" (in contrast to the prior reliance on export-led development), a move which "required an appreciable redistribution of income, giving a general tone to populist policies and making possible a harmonization of interests with the workers" (Villarreal, 1987: 72; see also Peralta-Ramos, 1992: 27). This corporatist project clearly required a redistribution of resources which had been vehemently resisted by the landed elite for decades, and as such augmented the conflict between the old and intransigent holders of power and those who became quickly accustomed to their new access to power and resources. Ultimately, for the 'losers' in the Peronist project--agrarian capital--this redistribution of power was unacceptable and resulted in numerous coalitions between this sector and the military in attempts to raid the state for short- and medium-term economic gain. However, the strength of those social forces associated with Peronism--organized labour and the domestic bourgeoisie--made a long-term reversal of power impossible until the mid-1970s, when, as we shall see, the Peronist movement began to implode under the force of its internal contradictions.³

Why was it so difficult in the case of Argentina to reach a more balanced compromise regarding the trajectory of development and the distribution of its benefits? Corradi argues that in the Argentine social formation the agency of modernization and

³ We should note here that the relationship between Peronism and the working class was deeply contradictory. As Villarreal points out, although unionized workers received great material benefit from the populist nature of the Peronist project, the power of labour frequently threatened to exceed the boundaries of the corporatist compromise with industrial capital (Villarreal, 1987: 72). Moreover, conflicts over the distribution of power between the Peronist party, the union leadership and the rank and file also created tensions which eventually exploded in the early 1970s. As Jelin points out, the level of integration of trade union structures into the state apparatus operated as a control mechanism on the wage and social demands of the working class, impeding the growth of an autonomous labour movement (Jelin, 1979: 234). As elsewhere (Britain in the late 1960s, for example), the need to enforce wage restraint and impede movements for increased industrial democracy resulted in open conflict between the rank and file and the union leadership by the time of the Social Pact of 1973. This is consistent with Panitch's discussion of corporatism in the European context (see The Impasse of Working Class Politics, 1986). We will revisit this issue later.

economic development has always been an external one. As such, a feature of this externally-derived economic and political development has been the chronic difficulty in establishing an organic hegemonic project capable of forging a stable coalition of social forces and a universalist discourse about the appropriate means, agents and beneficiaries of accumulation. Instead, as the result of "the accretion of disparate patterns of development induced from outside", the Argentine social formation comprised for most of the 20th century "a fragmentation of classes, a complex mix of old and new social relations, an over-extended state serving as [at least superficially] an arena of compromise, [and] a lack of structural unity" (Corradi, 1982-3: 61).⁴ As such, in the Argentine case it is clear that the political interests of capital were quite heterogenous and fragmented (Villarreal, 1987: 71). These fragments were not inert, but rather mobilized in the absence of a "common framework within which to mediate differences" (Corradi, 1982-3: 61). Moreover, the organizational expressions of these groups emerged as "mutually exclusive politico-ideological confrontations" (Villarreal, 1987: 71).

Therefore, intimately related to these particular class conflicts is the institutional form of conflict resolution in Argentina. Corradi contends that the Argentinian political process was "bi-dimensional", consisting of a constitutionally 'legitimate' set of institutions and "a parallel network of negotiations *in camera* between corporate interests" (Corradi, 1982-3: 64). The informal political process was that space where agreements between unions and various fractions of domestic and international(ist) capital were struck, a site of corporatist compromise which was exiled from formal politics with the ouster of Perón in 1955 and the subsequent attempts to eradicate Peronism as a social force. However, as

⁴ Corradi's point here is reminiscent of Barrington Moore's analysis of the impact that classes from pre-capitalist/pre-modern modes of production have on the path of economic development and the form of state in various social formations. Moore contends that the failure to fully integrate agrarian classes into capitalist relations of production impedes the development of democratic political institutions. See The Social Origins of Democracy and Dictatorship: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

Corradi points out, this parallel network was unstable, the rules of conduct and conflict resolution mutating with shifts in the relative power of the groups involved, and thus prompted the successive alteration of forms of domination, social explosion, and the subsequent intervention by the military in order to 're-equilibrate' this tenuous corporatism (Villarreal, 1987: 71). The military, in this context, remained an active domestic political agent rather than the guarantor of external security, thereby providing an exit from constitutionally legitimate politics whenever the balance of socio-economic power became unpalatable for various fractions of capital. Hence, the destabilizing impact of institutional bi-dimensionality was enhanced due to the nature of mutually exclusive social forces colliding within the informal political domain. Thus, Corradi characterizes Argentinian political life as one of "negative pluralism" in which classes that are too weak to lead are nonetheless able to block others from constructing a hegemonic project (Corradi, 1982-3: 62; Villarreal, 1987: 71). In these conditions of "rapid, discontinuous modernization", the institutional satisfaction of disparate social forces in economic and political terms became impossible, and both the left and the right increasingly relied upon extra-institutional locations of political struggle (Corradi, 1982-3: 62). Ultimately, the schizophrenic bi-dimensionality of Argentinian political life became untenable to such an extent that in 1966, the military regime of Onganía constituted itself for an undetermined length of tenure with "the explicit purpose of suspending politics indefinitely and steering an ambitious program of development in dependent association with transnational capital" (Corradi, 1982-3: 64).

Finally, it is important to recognize that the impact of modernization was not restricted to class relations. Modernization in Argentina also meant the growth of feminism and other forms of emancipatory struggle. The growth of feminism and the responses this movement evoked from powerful institutions must be understood against the material and discursive background of *machismo/marianismo*. *Machismo* is a "system of gender relations which exaggerates the differences between men and women according to their so-

called "natural" qualities and determines what is acceptable behaviour from each" (Fisher, 1993: 3). This system clearly asserts the superiority of the male over the female, measures human conduct against reified archetypes, and pervades church, family law, civil law, and culture in Argentina. *Marianismo*, *machismo*'s counterpart, "refers to the exalted respect women command as mothers" (Fisher, 1993: 3). In such a cultural matrix, "[w]omen are seen as protectors of the faith and virtue and encouraged to endure silently unhappy marriages and poverty" (Fisher, 1993: 4). Moreover, whatever social status women possess, it is derived from their reproductive role, and since "this has often been a source of power for women" one can begin to understand how consent to the gendered division of labour has been maintained. The salience of feminism in this context, then, is that it was somewhat effective in challenging and transforming traditional patriarchal social relations. The effectiveness of the feminist movement both at the level of state policy as well as in the private sphere, particularly regarding struggles around the extension of the franchise and the legalization of birth control, caused a great deal of discomfort on the part of those within institutions--in particular the Catholic Church and the military--whose material and social power was based in part on the promulgation and reproduction of unequal gender relations (Fisher, 1989: 7, 9; Fisher, 1993: 4-5). Therefore, feminism as a social force compounded for some sectors the sense of social and moral disintegration due to its challenging of the form and content of traditional social institutions, and provided much of the material and discursive basis for the conservative social project to be forged by the *Proceso*.

Thus, in the context of rapid modernization combined with intermittent reversals of that process, the proliferation and fragmentation of class and social forces into antagonistic camps, the absence of a commonly-accepted set of institutions for the legitimate mediation of conflict over political and economic resources, and a reliance on extra-institutional means of engaging in political struggle, the 1970s witnessed the ideological polarization of

Argentine political life. The attempt of the military regime of Onganía to reconstitute the existing political mechanisms produced such discontent that a "climate of generalized insurrection" was generated (Corradi, 1982-3: 64).

A very important aspect of the growth of political violence on behalf of the left and the right was the further demoting of institutional mechanisms of political expression, and in particular the exclusion of important social forces--namely Peronism--from the formal political sphere. Increasingly, exclusion from formal political mechanisms from 1955 until the early 1970s meant that Peronism, and popular voices in general, had to challenge the institutional framework itself in order to voice dissent or resistance. As such, the only political strategy open to popular forces was the destabilization of the system (Cavarozzi, 1986: 24).

The efforts of the political elites in the 1970s can therefore be characterized as a series of attempts to reestablish order and stability. The return of Perón from exile in 1973 reflected the Argentinian faith in the capacity of a strong, charismatic figure to (re)construct an acceptable social pact between adversaries in a *deus ex machina*-like manner.⁵ However, Perón was unable to reestablish the corporatist compromise of the 1950s. Instead, political polarization increased, both in society in general as well as within the Peronist movement itself. The death of Perón in 1974 further exacerbated the instability with the institution of his wife Isabel as president. Hers was a corrupt and bizarre regime. Isabel's reliance on Lopez Rega, her personal secretary and the Minister of Social Welfare, to oversee every aspect of governance reinforced the development of an illegitimate and unaccountable parallel government. This process was actively pursued by Lopez Rega,

⁵ This kind of leadership is referred to as the phenomena of *caudillismo*, or the notion that a strong man, due to his charisma and military abilities, could represent the wishes of the people without the aid of direct or representative democracy. This kind of virtual representation, usually based on force (or at least the willingness to use force) led to a tradition of leadership in which the *caudillo* has supreme power in his region. See Keen and Wasserman, 1988: 172, 176.

who, under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Welfare, established clandestine paramilitary organizations such as the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance (Triple A) designed to carry out a secret repression of the left both within and without the Peronist movement.

Emblematic of this ideological conflict was the so-called "full-scale guerrilla war waged by leftist groups against the army in the northern province of Tucuman".⁶ Urban political violence was at an all-time high, resulting in "an average of over three politically motivated murders a day" (Buchanan, 1987: 338). Political parties ceased to function, a situation particularly affecting the Peronist movement, whose diverse and contradictory ideological elements were no longer able to operate under the corporatist framework of the Justicialist Party, and fell in to a cycle of internecine violence that accelerated after the death of Perón in 1974. A sustained wave of strikes, work stoppages, and industrial sabotage paralyzed production. This, along with a huge fiscal deficit and an inflation rate exceeding 500 percent, led to rapid disinvestment by foreign capital aggravating the already severe balance of payments problem (Buchanan, 1987: 338). This situation served to intensify the perception of impending threat: "the cumulative effect of the continued and increased level of internecine violence, coupled with the inability of the Peronist regime to govern effectively, much less impose some modicum of social order in the face of daily strife, led to a perception on the part of most Argentines that the country was slipping into anarchic chaos" (Buchanan, 1987: 338-9).

Therefore, the crisis of the early 1970s was the result of an

⁶ It should be noted here that the extent of the guerrilla threat is a contentious matter. In his book Dossier Secreto (1993), Martin Anderson contends that reports of the numbers of guerrillas, both urban and rural, were vastly inflated by the military and security services in order to provide a pretext for the coup. Moreover, there is evidence that many of the Peronist revolutionary movements were themselves infiltrated, if not led, by security personnel, and as such the 'dirty war' is claimed to be the creation of the military as a means to destabilize Isabel Peron's government. See also Frontalini and Caiati, El mito de la 'guerra sucia', 1984.

ongoing hegemonic stalemate and political crisis during the postwar years [that] was caused by (1) the fundamental dichotomy of the agrarian and industrial sectors that resulted from the shift in the Argentine mode of production during the first half of the twentieth century; (2) the ensuing emergence of the urban industrial classes (particularly the domestic bourgeoisie and the organized labor movement) as economic and political actors, and (3) the ongoing regime change and the inability of contending social groups to establish a minimum level of consensus, much less agree to the hegemonic project of any of them in the interest of political stability (Buchanan, 1987: 337-8).

The deployment by the right of traditionalist discourse to explain the economic and political struggles and transformations was an appeal to those people in civil society who were fearful of disorder and desired order at almost any cost, as well as to those who adhered to a *caudillista* view of the relationship between leader and citizens. Therefore, the sense of generalized fear laid the basis in civil society for the acceptance of a military dictatorship (Perelli, 1992: 418); as research by O'Donnell and Galli demonstrated, Argentines asked about their perception of the pre-dictatorship situation overwhelmingly responded that it was "an intolerable situation in response to which any stern regime was acceptable. Any order is preferable to no order at all, to a feeling of primordial chaos. This quest for order prepares the ground for the acceptance of authoritarian policies" (Corradi, 1987: 115). The violence and economic instability finally exceeded the limits of endurance, and the military, who had been involved in the process of destabilization, saw their opportunity to initiate their project of order.

The Proceso de Reorganización Nacional

As discussed in the previous section, because of the failure of any one class fraction to establish hegemony since the death of Perón in 1974, the military, acting in concert with agro-export and transnational financial interests on the basis of "a shared conceptualization of Argentine society and the evils that afflicted it", felt it opportune (and necessary) to attempt one of the most intense social and economic restructurings on the continent (Buchanan, 1987: 354). The *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* sought to restore

Argentina to its former status as an international economic power, the demise of which was rooted in the "advent of Peronism as a political and social force in the mid-1940s" and its pursuit of import substitution industrialization (Buchanan, 1987: 354). Peronist ISI policies were deemed 'inefficient' as tariffs protected uncompetitive industries, artificially skewed the relative prices of industrial and agricultural goods in favour of the former, and entailed extensive state intervention which interfered with the effective operation of the market. Most importantly, in the eyes of agrarian capital and the military, industry was the basis of working-class power, which had to be broken in order to restore profitability. In pursuit of this goal, the junta endeavoured to deindustrialize the economy and transfer economic resources back to the landed oligarchy, break the political and economic strength of both organized labour and domestic industrial capital with brutal methods, and engineer an ideological transformation by retrenching "Christian and Western values". All that was associated with Peronism--economic structures and policies, political compromises, groups that had been its sources of support and beneficiaries, ideas and lifestyles--was subject to intense eradication measures (Buchanan, 1987: 350; Munck et al, 1987: 208). Ultimately the junta was not "successful" in its own terms, that is, it did not accomplish the restoration of Argentina's global economic status, but the *Proceso* did have a profound impact on Argentine life, leaving in its wake a disassembled economy, no legitimate political process, and a fractured civil society whose collective identities were significantly mangled.

As previously mentioned, the *Proceso*'s primary aim was to restore Argentina's wealth by reestablishing a more 'effective' regime of accumulation than that operating in the post-war period. This project was based upon a monetarist economic analysis which rejected the Peronist ISI strategy as promoting inefficiency in the form of tariff-protected industry and excessive state intervention. According to this neo-conservative view, the Peronist project was at root ill-conceived, as it discriminated against "the repository of the natural competitive advantages of the country", the agro-export sector, "in order to serve

demagogic, although inefficient, policies of income redistribution" (Buchanan, 1987: 357). Furthermore, the power of a corporatist labour movement was deemed unacceptable, as they apparently "conspired with the industrial bourgeoisie to structurally adjust prices to costs behind the tariff barriers. This made it possible for the industrial classes to agree on wages and prices, which created a structural tendency toward inflation and low productivity" (Buchanan, 1987: 357).

Clearly, the 'losers' in the economic organization of the Peronist period were the agricultural classes, who were subject to domestic price controls and export taxes which benefited the large domestic working class (Buchanan, 1987: 357). As had been the case with the several coups that had taken place since the fall of Perón in 1955, in 1976

agro-export and transnational/financial sectoral interests converged with conservative military and civilian interests on security and negative ideological grounds (i.e., anti-Peronism). These were posed against the interests of the domestic bourgeoisie and working classes at the economic, political, and social levels, since the latter constituted the social bases of the Peronist movement and, hence, were considered the ultimate culprits in the debacle of the Peronist regime (Buchanan, 1987: 343).

The economic program of the *Proceso* was fundamentally predicated upon the extensive systematization of political repression focused on the working class and related sectors, a relation to which we will return soon. Here we will more strictly focus on the implementation of the economic plan, with a focus on the link between the Economy ministry and the class nature of the junta. Interestingly, according to Buchanan, although the *Proceso* inaugurated an extensive and virtually complete militarization of the upper echelons of the state apparatus, with "every major branch of the state ...staffed through the departmental level with military personnel," this was not the case for the Economy ministry (Buchanan, 1987: 352). In fact,

the sole branch of the state controlled entirely by civilians during the "*Proceso*" was the economic management branch, under the leadership of the Ministry of Economy. This included all nonmilitary public enterprises and the Secretariats of Commerce, Finance, Industry, and Agriculture, as well as the Central Bank. As such, the Ministry of Economy was the principal, when not sole, articulator of economic policy during this period (Buchanan, 1987: 353).

Furthermore, the overtly class-based policies of this Ministry were symbolized by the fact that it was

headed by former Minister of Economy, Secretary of Agriculture, officer of the large landholders' association (the *Sociedad Rural Argentina*), Business Council director and academician Jose Martinez de Hoz. More than a man of extensive credentials, Martinez de Hoz "symbolized through his personal interests the unity of agrarian, industrial, and financial concerns" (Munck, 1984: 298)...Once Martinez de Hoz was installed, this also ensured that their interests took precedence over all others within the regime's economic program (Buchanan, 1987: 353).

It is difficult to repudiate an instrumental notion of the Argentine state in such a situation.

As mentioned before, monetarism was diagnosed as the appropriate solution to the crisis in accumulation. Monetarism asserts that the free market is the most efficient and appropriate distributor of resources, and the public sector should not interfere with its functioning (Munck, 1989: 49/50). Thusly, the key elements of the junta's economic program were: the opening of markets to international trade and investment through the dismantling of import tariffs and government regulation, the encouragement of agricultural exports and the cutting of subsidies to non-traditional exports (*apertura de la economía*); the liberalization of exchange and financial markets in order to guarantee the free flow of capital (*reforma financiera*); the deregulation of prices and the reduction of real wages so as to combat inflation (*sinceramiento de los precios*); and the reduction of public expenditures and employment, the reprivatization of state enterprises, and the elimination of deficient social services through tight monetary and fiscal policy (*subsidiariedad del Estado*). Generally speaking, these monetarist policies were aimed at deindustrialization by effecting a shift in resources from the domestic industrial sector to those--primarily agro-industry--which were oriented towards international export markets. (Munck, 1985: 58; Munck, 1989: 51; Canitrot, 1980; Buchanan, 1987: 357) As Munck argues, these measures were aimed at forging "a new regime of accumulation...in a broad economic and political restructuring process which cannot be reduced to a simplistic return to pre-1930s

conditions." (Munck, 1989: 52).

Each of these elements had a fundamental impact upon the organization and functioning of the industrial sector. The opening of the domestic market entailed an across the board reduction in import duties, thus ending the protection of Argentine industry and flooding the domestic market with foreign products. The lowering of tariffs was accompanied by a reduction in export taxes on agricultural staples, which, along with subsidies for agriculture, led to cereal exports in 1977 75% above the levels from 1973-1976 (Ferrer, 1980: 139; Munck, 1985: 64).

The financial reform in mid-1977 freed interest rates and "prompted a spectacular growth of finance companies" or *financieras* (Munck, 1985: 59). Not only did this policy result in a financial boom, with the financial sector growing 45% between 1976 and 1980, it also set in motion a process of concentration, particularly as high interest rates, making the procurement of loans for capital investment extremely costly, transferred assets from productive to speculative sectors of the economy (Munck, 1985: 59; Munck, 1989: 51, 59). International speculative capital flooded Argentina in search of rapid profit, and the financial sector "became the hegemonic fraction within the ruling class block" (Munck, 1985: 59). This financial capital was primarily 'internationalist' in nature (comprised of foreign capital and domestic capital with an internationalist orientation), and the liberalization of finance markets allowed for the "increased penetration of foreign capital into Argentina" (Munck, 1985: 59).

Changes in relative prices were also used to shift the flow of resources from industry to export agriculture. Whereas since the Peronist period industrial prices were 40% higher than those of agriculture, a trend of rising agricultural prices and lowered industrial prices was set in motion in 1976 (Ferrer, 1980: 139-40; Munck, 1985: 65).

Regarding the role of the state in the economy, the twin objectives of Martinez de Hoz were reduction and 'rationalization' of state spending and the denationalization of state

enterprises (Munck, 1985: 62). While the reduction of public payrolls was particularly effective, with a 29.4% reduction in state sector employment from 1976-1980, public expenditures as a whole were not significantly staunched. The initial decreases of the share of government spending as a portion of GNP (from 39% in 1975 to 34% in 1977) were erased by 1979 (Munck, 1985: 63, 65). In effect, change in the Argentine state during the *Proceso* was focused on the 'rationalization' or redistribution of state expenditures owing to an ideological reconceptualization of the appropriate role of the state in the economy. In particular, there has been a marked reduction in what Munck refers to as the "legitimation operations" of the state and an attempt to privatize "the burden of welfare provision in the spheres of housing, education and social security" (Munck, 1985: 63; Waylen, 1992: 153).

The results of this process for industry and industrial workers were devastating. There was a 26% decline in industrial employment from 1975-1980, real wages declined by 1978 to almost 50% below the level in 1974 such that workers' share of GNP fell from 47% to 30% between 1975 and 1976. By 1981, Argentine industry was operating at 50% capacity (Munck, 1985: 61; Ferrer, 1980: 139, 142).

The socio-political project behind deindustrialization as implemented by Martinez de Hoz was clearly "designed to eliminate those very industries in which unions had greatest strength" as well as to punish "the 'traitorous' domestic entrepreneurs who had allied themselves with the Peronists" (Buchanan, 1987: 360). Deindustrialization led to the creation of a large pool of unemployed whose collective identities and organizations were decimated and powerless and who could now be employed in the less-unionized and lower-paying agricultural sector.

However, it could not be expected that the industrial working class would gracefully accept the deindustrializing of the economy. Hence, the junta's project can also be seen as an attempt to construct hegemony based on a new regime of accumulation.

Buchanan thusly contends that the *Proceso* was not merely a project to restore order, but to reassert the basic social and political conditions which would allow for the unhindered accumulation of capital. In other words, the Argentine junta endeavoured to create the "willing consent of subordinate classes to the leadership of the dominant bloc", or hegemony, through the exercise of domination, the means through which drastic changes in economic, political and cultural relations were to be instituted (Buchanan, 1987: 344). In other words, political repression was the means through which the junta secured 'consent' to the redistribution of wealth and power to the agro-export class. Clearly this meant that the conditions for a kind of Gramscian hegemony were not present, and that the only tool available to the junta was force.

The *Proceso* was therefore not just an exercise in economic restructuring nor merely a resurgence of authoritarian politics. What must also be recognized is that the *Proceso* "was an attempt to carry out a general restructuring of the relations of power existing in the social formation", involving a modification of "their bases of support and the organizational forms that expressed them" (Villarreal, 1987: 70). It constituted a clear attempt to transform cultural and ideological values, and to retrench an hegemony based upon the values of tradition, hierarchy and Catholicism. This consent was to be constructed out of a "climate of fear" through the use of both active and subtle coercion. The violence with which this consent was constructed is consistent with Gramsci's notion of *dominio*, the coercive project necessary in situations of hegemonic crisis, such as was the case in Argentina in the early 1970s. Fear was created not for fear's sake, but in order to "intimidate into utter submission the body politic in general, but more specifically those groups that may be opposed to the regime or some of its policies", in particular the organized working class and domestic bourgeoisie, political parties, intellectual, legal, professional, and human rights groups and the resident foreign communities, who could be expected to mount resistance to the economic project of the junta if their organizations and collective identities

were left intact (Buchanan, 1987: 347). Hence, "[t]he amplitude of the repression, the brutality and decentralized character of the methods used...the impunity of unit leaders within the armed forces, the use of torture, reprisals, and summary executions, the disappearance of suspects, all point towards creating a climate of dissuasive fear" (Rouquie, 1983: 73).

The coalition of capitalist fractions, the military and the Church was not merely held together by material interests and free-market ideology; the discursive connections between these groups were also based on "a shared conservative vision of Argentine society" which provided the 'moral' and ideological cement for the project of economic restructuring and legitimized the fierce repression used to combat 'communist subversion'. The 'National Security Doctrine' had a prominent role in this discourse, which identified the major threat to the foundations of social order as 'internal subversion' or the 'internal enemy'⁷ (Caviedes, 1984; Zagorski, 1992; Perelli, 1992; Avellaneda, 1987). Certainly this referred to those who identified with Marxist ideology and who actively challenged the legitimacy of capitalist economic and social relations. However, the definition of the 'enemy' also encompassed anyone resisting traditional norms or standards of behaviour. In this sense, threats to the "Argentine life style", defined in terms of traditional sexuality, family relations and Catholic/Christian morality, include a wide range of cultural practices identified as external to the supposed homogeneity and coherence of the social order, and greatly expanded the persons potentially subject to the repression of the state (Avellaneda, 1987: 25-6). As such, the distinction between action and thought was completely collapsed; as Fagen explains, "[t]he breadth of...state terror owed much to [the military's]

⁷ Carina Perelli argues that this notion of the 'National Security Doctrine' is an Argentine adaptation of the French *doctrine de guerre revolutionnaire* developed in the defense of colonial rule in Algeria. She writes: "According to this doctrine, subversive warfare is a war to conquer the soul of the population. Therefore, it does not rely exclusively on armed confrontation. In fact, the armed struggle is only one of several means to be employed. But true combat will be waged inside the soul of the nation" (Perelli, 1992: 421-2).

further assumption that groups and individuals advocating social change shared a subversive mentality, even if they had not engaged in subversive acts" (Fagen, 1992: 43). The definition of culture in terms of "legitimate" and "illegitimate" is supported by a broader notion of the mind as a battleground. In this sense, national security no longer has a geographical referent, but instead a spiritual one, in which the defence of "the West" as "spirit", an "attitude of the soul", and an "historic evolution" rather than a place is paramount (Avellaneda, 1987: 25; 31). Therefore, the *Proceso* must also be seen as a war over and against ideas (Fagen, 1992: 42).

Of particular importance here in the return to traditional modes of authority was the appeal to the discourse of gender and the appropriate roles of men and women. The cultural context of *machismo* and *marianismo*, as discussed above, became articulated with the military project. The social project of the dictatorship tapped into cultural assumptions held by some women (especially middle and upper middle class women), and used them for a mobilization of women in support of traditional values (although this was much more prevalent in Chile):

Underlying the relationship between the military and the Church in Argentina was a shared belief in the importance of traditional family and Christian values. In the 1976 coup the military claimed to be 'reaffirming the family as the base of our society' and promoted the traditional image of women as guardians of the faith and defenders of the family. In this they were assisted by the oldest of Argentina's housewives' organizations, the League of Housewives⁸ (Fisher, 1993: 143).

The junta's attempt to privatize society therefore also extended to the family, which was to be the refuge from the over-politicization of society that corporatism had wrought. This was a psychological process of privatization, a return to family as the basic unit of society, and in fact society's only cell, as all other forms of solidarity were to be destroyed (Feijoo, 1991: 75). Furthermore, the implications for women were serious, as the junta's

⁸ Founded in 1954, the League of Housewives is comprised of upper- and upper-middle class women linked to the Catholic Church and "certain right wing-sectors" (Feijoo and Gogna, 1990: 98).

ideological "return to the family further reinforced women's subordinate position. They were appealed to as wives and mothers to become the custodian of family order, a retrenchment of women's position under *marianismo* (Feijoo and Gogna, 1990: 84).

Thus, through this shared nostalgia and a reactionary ideological perspective, these groups were able to form a 'collective identity'. This shared diagnosis of the ills of modern Argentinian social life included a view that 'liberalism' had had "deleterious effects" on the populace. "Drug addiction, vandalism, sexual license and perversion, pornography, feminism, divorce, usury, and encroaching Marxism--these and other purported social pathologies were all attributed to the subversive influence of the liberalized atmosphere that permeated society under the Peronist regime" (Buchanan, 1987: 354).

The project was designed to have both short- and long-term effects. In the short run, the disarticulation and paralysis of the working class was an expedient manner to implement the complete turn-around of the Argentine economy (Sonderéguer, 1985: 10). In the long-run, the *Proceso* possessed a foundational intent, aimed at completely restructuring social relations through a transformation of 'mentality' (Sonderéguer, 1985: 10). This profound transformation in social relations was meant to permanently extinguish

Peronism and other corrupting influences that detracted from the traditional values of the nation. This included the return to a situation of respect for traditional authority such as the military and the Roman Catholic church, the elimination of corrupting influences such as feminism, nontraditional religions, and "delinquent" art forms and the reassertion of the "proper" role of both men and women within the family and society at large (Buchanan, 1987: 356).

This battle for the 'soul of the nation' was operationalized very concretely in the form of systematized and clandestine repression. The nature of the state terror implemented by the Argentine military has been extensively documented, particularly in the document produced by the National Commission of Disappeared Persons (see Chapter 5 for further discussion). The format of disappearances was readily identifiable, and Perelli's description is quite vivid:

Security personnel in civilian clothes arrived at a house in a car with no plates--the notorious Ford Falcon, as this make was spacious enough to enable several kidnapped people to be thrown to the floor. They took their prisoners but also looted the house, terrorized the remaining relatives, and destroyed what they couldn't or wouldn't take with them. Most of these operations were conducted at night, as this was considered an extra psychological asset, but many were carried out in broad daylight, sometimes under the very eyes of policemen detached to guard embassies or banks. The victims were torn out of their homes or of their workplaces blindfolded and manacled, amid shouts and obscenities. That was the last image people had of the victims of repression before they disappeared into one of the 'black holes' of the universe of terror...The use of torture was routine in [clandestine detention] centers; the dehumanization of prisoners through torture, rape and humiliation, systematic (Perelli, 1992: 423-4).

Moreover, the targets of these disappearances were primarily young. CONADEP's figures on the age of *desaparecidos* indicate that 81.39% of victims were between the ages of 16 and 35, with the age group 21-25 registering the most at 32.62% (CONADEP, 1986: 285). In many ways the Proceso engineered the disappearance of the better part of a generation. This included some of the best and brightest, and unionists, university students, journalists, human right lawyers, or doctors working in the *villas miserias* were among the ranks of the disappeared. Furthermore, despite the prevalent discursive support for "the family" as well as the glorification of women as the moral soul of the nation, 30% of the *desaparecidos* were women, and 10% of those were pregnant at the time of their kidnapping (CONADEP, 1986: 285). Moreover, there are countless testimonies which give evidence to entire families being taken away, as well as young children being left on the street or in their houses alone while the military removed their parents. As well, in the words of the CONADEP report, the family of the *desaparecido* was also a victim, held in a state of limbo with the lack of information regarding the whereabouts of a loved one, and was often placed in the position of hostage, as attempts to uncover information were often met with threats of disappearance (CONADEP, 1986: 321-332). Clearly, the notion of threat extended beyond "subversive" individuals to include the notion of nascent subversion in the children of those who were enemies of the state. In this sense, the *Proceso* was an attempt to dispense with the political-economic threat of the working class,

but also to reengineer from above the structure and character of families and family relations.

In terms of its purpose in the broader ideological struggle, this state terror was intended to produce at least two types of effects on the population. Firstly, terror of this nature has a behavioral component which desires to "shape political behaviour to exact compliance with the directives of power holders" (Corradi, 1982-3: 63). As such, the purpose of systematized repression was not only to purge the nation of leftists and 'subversives', but also "to discourage people from organizing for any politically motivated reason" (Fagen, 1992: 40). However, terror is also utilized to elicit ideological effects, in other words, "to mold attitudes so as to obtain voluntary compliance" (Corradi, 1982-3: 63). The format of disappearances, as seen in the above description, is clearly intended to have effects that go beyond the targeted person. Rather, the public and excessively violent nature of military activities (despite official denials) leads to the conclusion that the terrorization, humiliation and dehumanization of the wider public was part of the *Proceso's* goals (Fagen, 1992: 63). It is in the construction of a culture of fear that we see these aims come to fruition.

Therefore, it is particularly important to discuss the effects that this terror had upon the context for organizing resistance, and particularly on individual interpretations of the field of political and social interaction. Primarily, terror of this nature, unpredictable, arbitrary, anonymous and operating with impunity, effected the destruction of sociability and solidarity, leading to a thorough individualization and atomization of Argentine society. This breakdown of solidarity "was most evident in the generalized attitude of '*no te metas*' or 'don't get involved' that characterized Argentine society during this period" (Buchanan, 1987: 374). The psychology of fear caused a turning inward in response to the growing sense that no one could be trusted (Fagen, 1992: 62). This transformation in the way that people interpret the field of political action reinforced the physical blockage of political

activity through repression, as people abandoned any social activity that might have had political content or involved the collective pursuit of economic demands" (Fagen, 1992: 62). As Buchanan argues, "such alienation lay at the core of, and yet was a product of, desocialization and identity regression that was produced by the pervasive atmosphere of fear" (Buchanan, 1987: 374). In sum, as O'Donnell and Galli's 1980 study⁹ showed,

the main features of fear as a mode of adaptation are: depoliticization; a significant reduction in associational activity; the denial of object practices (the development of a passion for ignorance among groups that are potential targets of state terror); the endorsement of economic privatization; the adoption of selfish strategies of survival, competition, speculation, in short, the blossoming of a 'bad neighbour' economic policy in everyday life (Corradi, 1987: 119).

One should not discount the role of the repression in creating "rational maximizing individuals" of the kind exalted by liberal theory as the most propitious for the accumulation of capital.

Conclusions

In a sense, the *Proceso's* project completes a circle--not only did the military-agrarian-finance capital alliance attempt to reconstruct political-economic relations at the level of economic policy, its repressive practices were also designed to forcibly created the social bases for competitive capitalism in a way that corporatist assimilation of subordinate interests could not. Quite clearly, the material structure of class and production relations--both intra-class and inter-class relations, I might add--that characterized the Argentine social formation was a crucial factor in the events of the 1970s and 80s. In other words, the relationship of various classes to the institutions of political power and to various development paths was the source of a great deal of resentment and set the state for the alliance between the agrarian oligarchy, the military and the Church. Therefore, as I have

⁹ Guillermo O'Donnell and Cecilia Galli, "Adaptations to Social Change at the Micro Level", Report to the Social Science Research Council, 1980.

argued above, we must see the *Proceso* as in part a class project with specific aims of redistributing class power, particularly away from the working class which was seen to be the legacy of Peronist politics and economic policy.

However, what I have also argued in this chapter is that the Argentine political sphere was one characterized by the inability of any group or alliance to create a durable hegemony, due to the nature of dependent capitalist development in Argentina. These political relations were exacerbated by the fractious nature of the Argentine capitalist class, and the growing splits in the labour movement stemming from its implication in corporatist practices. Moreover, these divisions were refracted into Argentine political institutions, the legacy of which was a stark polarization of interests and ideologies which meant that dissent could only be voiced outside of the spheres of institutionalized power in increasingly destructive and destabilizing ways. The "if you are not for us, you are against us" style of political discourse was to have profound implications for Las Madres--internally and externally--right up into the democratic transition.

However, even though the *Proceso* was a class project, it was also a traditional project based on the construction of threat as the "modern". Clearly, the left was the prominent element in the threats identified by the "Doctrine of National Security", the notion that all non- or anti-traditional expressions presented risks to the Argentine way of life became a powerful aspect of the alliance which supported the junta. This zero-sum interpretation of politics led to an extreme project to eradicate difference both in practice and in thought. The traditionalism and Catholicism which infused the discourse around what defined Argentine culture touched deeply-held cultural assumptions and fears, and in the case of "the feminist threat", played on the fear of losing power to women. These ideological constructions combined with the practices of arbitrary state terror produced a culture of fear wherein the population was generally incapable of envisioning alternative meanings and social relations, effectively paralyzing dissent. In other words, the

Proceso's class project was mightily strengthened by its appeal to other, non-class discourses, which would have to be challenged in their own right. This is perhaps one of the most important reasons for paying attention to post-Marxist insights on discourse.

As we shall see, Las Madres emerged from this context, presenting both an alternative vision of politics but also fitting into prevailing Argentine political practices. Certainly Las Madres were to develop an alternative vision of the meaning and practice of politics, but their non-negotiable program based on fundamental values and their political activism outside of institutional politics do present us with some interesting continuities with Argentine political culture. However, what is most interesting is the way Las Madres, political novices by their own account, were able to strategically challenge the practices of the junta in ways that effectively exposed contradictions while (at least for the first several years) protecting themselves from brutal repression. As will become clear, Las Madres did not articulate their project in terms of class, but instead relied on a Christian humanist discourse of the sanctity of life and the family--in direct opposition to the junta's use of Catholic tradition and vision of the family. In this way, Las Madres turned the junta's discourse on the family on its head. Moreover, their status as older women played into the ideological constructs of *machismo/marianismo* in such a way as to deflect serious attention by the junta and protect them during the crucial period of organization-building. Finally, the Mothers did not directly challenge perceptions of the traditional--they being generally devout religious housewives rather than feminists--but instead subverted them by presenting an alternative vision of these images. In this sense, the fact that their struggle was mostly symbolic in the face of an extremely material class war was perhaps the political advantage that made Las Madres as effective as they were during the dictatorship.

Chapter 4: The Emergence of Las Madres: 1977-1983

As we saw in Chapter 3, as a fundamental aspect of its project of social reconstruction, the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* utilized brutal methods of political and social repression. The intent of this repression was not merely to silence the working class and its sympathizers, but also to destroy all forms of collective identity seen as potential threats to the traditional order. An important aspect of this project was the deployment of a patriarchal discourse which glorified the family as the basic unit of social life and reasserted women's traditional role within that unit--the protector of social morality, as well as the provider of material and emotional support for a male workforce and citizenry. This discourse called for the privatization of economic, political and social life and implicitly relied upon the labour of women to provide social welfare and community, constituting an attack on those elements of the state which addressed the needs/interests of the popular sectors. Furthermore, the increase in the responsibilities of women resulting from the removal of the state from the sphere of social provision meant a reinforcement of women's reproductive role, and necessarily constrained and delegitimized women's activities as producers or citizens.

However, despite this demobilizing discourse based on traditional assumptions about the sexual division of labour and the increasing material constraints on the possibilities for female political activity, women became the first to mobilize against the military project, ironically precisely around those identities and values promoted by the junta. The increase in the intensity of the repression after the coup in March 1976 meant that large numbers of families began searching for information regarding the fate of their children. This search entailed repeated visits to government offices, military headquarters, police stations, courts, prisons and church rectories, and it was primarily middle-aged women who did not work outside the home who were able to make these inquiries. As

people began to encounter one another repeatedly in these places, they began to form groups based on friendship and mutual support so that they would not have to endure the bureaucracy and the growing desperation in solitude. As the enormity of the repression became apparent to those women--they witnessed the numbers of people looking for children on a daily basis--anger drove many of them to seek a more direct and public method of demanding information. Thus, in April of 1977, over a year after the coup, a group of approximately 14 mothers made the decision to go to the Plaza de Mayo.

The choice of Plaza de Mayo as the space for meeting and organizing was both practical and weightily symbolic. Plaza de Mayo is the public space in front of the *Casa Rosada*, the presidential palace, which was where the junta had moved the offices of the Ministry of the Interior which was responsible for receiving inquiries about the *desaparecidos*. However, *Plaza de Mayo* is also that public space for the important political events in Argentine history--demonstrations, protests, military coups. It is that space where working class men repeatedly demanded their political and economic rights, and is a symbol of the victory of the people. Furthermore, the plaza is located at the nexus of power in Argentina: it is surrounded by buildings housing the offices of the Executive, numerous foreign banks, and the Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires. Moreover, the Plaza is a profoundly gendered space, in that it was the preserve of men seeking political expression. This male space of political power--symbolized most potently by the surrounding of the plaza by military men, but now devoid of men of the middle and working classes--was now to be occupied by mothers on a weekly basis.

The initial purpose and demands of the group was therefore quite simple: they desired to overcome the isolation and fear that the disappearance of their children and the technocratic barriers of the junta had wrought, and they sought to gain information by making the events of their shared experiences public. At first the meetings in the Plaza were to exchange information and discuss what could be done about retrieving their

children. However, as the military would not allow them to sit and talk--this constituting an "illegal public gathering--the Mothers began to walk around the monument in silence, a ritual with great symbolic power which was to be repeated every Thursday up to the present. The strategy to distribute information was clandestine at first, but Las Madres grew bolder as their numbers increased. By the end of 1977, the women were placing ads in the newspapers and circulating petitions demanding information about their family members. As their organization grew, Las Madres began making contact with foreign governments, the international press and human rights organizations in the hopes of bringing international pressure to bear on the junta. While initially ignored by the government as harmless *locas*, or crazy women, once details of the repression began to circulate outside of Argentina attempts to repress the organization began. After attempts at intimidation by riot squads failed, the military began to infiltrate the movement and 14 mothers, including several of the most militant like Azucena de Vicente Villaflor, were themselves disappeared in December 1977. Harassment and arrests became more frequent, until finally, at the end of 1978, the Plaza de Mayo was sealed off.

These events did not deter Las Madres. Rather than allow themselves to be silenced, as so many Argentines had, Las Madres responded by formalizing their organization on 22 August 1979. By forming the *Asociación Civil Madres de Plaza de Mayo* and constituting themselves as a legal entity, the women felt their existence could not be denied and that they could therefore be afforded some level of protection against disappearance. A formal organizational structure allowed the movement to expand into the provinces, reach more mothers and coordinate strategies on a national and international level, and the important step of creating another social space--the Mothers' House--was also undertaken. By the end of 1979, Las Madres were ready to return to the Plaza de Mayo regardless of the reprisals they would be subject to. By the time the military government began to collapse under the weight of its own internal conflicts, the failure of

the junta's economic policy and resurgence of protest from the rank and file unionists, Las Madres were in an organizational and ethical position to be among the leaders of the anti-authoritarian movement.

With this brief synopsis of the development of the movement, let us now turn to examine in more detail the processes by which mothers began to constitute themselves politically and collectively. Firstly, an examination of the processes of identity formation will be offered, with an eye to the conditions which may have promoted the politicization of certain self-conceptions over others. Then, we shall pursue an analysis of the political strategies developed by Las Madres as well as examine the spaces--both material and discursive--in which they chose to engage in struggle. The primary argument I am pursuing here is that Las Madres combined a set of new political identities and strategies with both novel and traditional sites of struggle. As such, while the post-Marxist paradigm illuminates the symbolic and cultural aspects of the struggle of Las Madres, it ignores those continuities like a direct confrontation with the state which ultimately produced some of the limitations on the movement.

Identity, Consciousness and Solidarity

Las Madres began as mothers. This seeming truism captures the self-conception of the women who commenced the process of resistance against the *Proceso*: they did not understand their activities to be 'political', but part of their "natural duty as good wives and mothers" (Fisher, 1993a: 30). Renee Epelbaum, one of the founding members of Las Madres, emphasizes that "[w]e founded the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo without any political goals. We wanted to save our children from prison and torture" (Agosin, 1989: 39). Few of the Mothers had been politically active prior to the dictatorship, and their identity as 'mother' had never before been political or public in any way: "the abduction of a child was the catalyst that prompted a mother to act" (Navarro, 1989: 256).

The kidnappings were brutal assaults on women, against their role as mothers. Suddenly deprived of their children, their lives as wives and mothers had lost meaning. They had to reconstruct their shattered lives, not only by searching for their children, as earlier they had cared for them, nursed them, educated them, and worried about them, but by attempting to do the impossible on their behalf. They were compelled to act not on moral or political grounds or out of concern for gross human rights violations, as in the case of other groups, but because they were mothers. (Navarro, 1989: 256).

Therefore, in addition to the overwhelming desire to protect and recover their children, women began to search for a means to reconstruct one of the defining roles of their existence as women: motherhood. Importantly, Las Madres were in search of themselves as well as their families.

The material foundations for the mobilization of these women as mothers lay in the repressive measures of the regime. As Navarro points out, "[s]ince the junta concentrated its repression on young people between twenty and thirty, it created a critical mass of women who despite class divisions and differences in life experiences or values had one crucial thing in common: they were mothers of children who had disappeared" (Navarro, 1989: 257). In other words, the extremely tangible condition of losing a child provided the basis upon which a collective identity--Las Madres--could be constructed out of the individually experienced identity of 'mother'.

There are two processes in the construction of Las Madres as a politically and emotionally relevant identity that require examination: how is that *women* came to be politically motivated on the basis of their role as mother, and how is it that their experience of disappearance and searching led them to understand themselves in collective terms? Certainly it was not only women who experienced the disappearance of children and relatives, nor did all women choose to deal with their painful ordeal through collective means. While it is impossible to specify the reasons why particular women and not others became politicized, it is possible to point to particular material and discursive conditions which promoted the collective activity of mothers.

The sexist assumptions of the military apparatus offer a potent explanation of why

women as mothers organized politically and defied the prohibition against public protest. Many felt that it was more dangerous for men to mount public opposition to the repression, because the military had no compunction about 'disappearing' men (Fisher, 1989: 59). It was recognized early on that, being women, Las Madres could take strategic advantage of their presumed weakness. As one Mother explains, "[the military] didn't destroy us immediately because they thought we couldn't do anything and when they wanted to, it was too late. We were already organized. They thought these old women will be scared off by the arrests, that it would be enough" (Marina de Curia in Fisher, 1989: 60-61). Thusly, by underestimating Las Madres because they were older women, the military "fell victim to the misconceptions of their own *machismo*" and allowed space for the growth and strengthening of the organization (Fisher, 1989: 60). The specific ways in which Las Madres creatively utilized *machista* ideology against state authorities, as well as how they began to challenge the ideology itself will be elaborated in the discussion on strategy.

Furthermore, the Kafkaesque manner in which the military structured the search for the *desaparecidos* in itself promoted the development, by women, of a *collective strategy* to deal with the overwhelming personal pain. The time-consuming tasks of waiting in line, travelling long distances, filing writs of *habeas corpus* meant that mothers--most of whom were middle-aged housewives less likely to have small children to care for--were the ones to undertake the search, rather than fathers who were working or disappeared themselves (Navarro, 1989: 257).

The forcing of family members to visit the same "endless circuit of military headquarters, courts, prisons and government offices" allowed the women to encounter repeatedly the same faces and form personal bonds of solidarity with each other (Fisher, 1989: 27; Jelín, 1986: 25). As one Mother describes, "[a]s we began to recognize in the faces of other women the same despair and desperation we felt, we began to realise that we weren't alone, that there were hundreds of mothers like us, searching for their children"

(Maria del Rosario in Fisher, 1993b: 105) Women began to make these frustrating, insulting and fruitless pilgrimages together as a way to make themselves feel more powerful and less alone. "By July 1976 there were thirty of us...and every week we went together to different places. We went to the church as well. Twenty-seven of us were allowed in to see the three bishops who were the heads of the episcopate. They didn't give us any information. They recommended that we pray to the Virgin" (Maria del Rosario in Fisher, 1989: 27). Officials offered the mothers speculations that their sons had run away with women, that their daughters were working somewhere as prostitutes (Maria del Rosario in Fisher, 1989: 29). These kinds of dismissive responses, in addition to abusive comments that shifted responsibility for their children's disappearances onto the mothers' inability to raise their children properly, augmented the grief of Las Madres, but also their anger. "[The military and church] took information from us. They didn't give us any. Out of desperation, we began to shout 'What have you done with our children?' We began to lose our tempers and this anger helped to make us stronger" (Dora de Bazze in Fisher, 1989: 28). By refusing to turn their anger inward, by resisting the psychological manipulation of military functionaries, Las Madres were able to battle their sense of powerlessness and begin to resist the authoritarian project. Therefore, the junta produced circumstances which, while intending to contain or silence women and collective actors in general, provided the basis for the mobilization around motherhood and the formation of a novel collective identity.

The anger of the mothers culminated in a reckless outburst of energy which led them to protest publicly in the *Plaza de Mayo* in a period when all such public meetings were prohibited. The collective experience of terror in this direct challenge to the military was a bonding experience. Aida de Suárez' account of her personal experience speaks to this process:

The first Thursday I got off the bus and just stood there in the street. I saw some women but I didn't know what to do...I felt afraid, like you always do when you do something for the first time. Then I saw the woman who had waited for me outside the Ministry of the Interior. What luck she was there! I walked straight towards her, without looking to either side, without looking at the police. At first you feel afraid, but when I got to the Mothers they all seemed so strong...and how can you feel afraid when you are fighting for a just cause? I cried a lot, but they were tears of relief. I felt like another person. Because looking at the faces of other mothers who had experienced the same as me gave me the strength to fight (Fisher, 1989: 29).

Therefore, the common experiences of repression, frustration, despair and anger led Mothers to see not only that they possessed shared interests, but also to discover the increased power and comfort to be found in the creation of solidarity. Through collective action, women discovered that they had the power not only to resist state terror, but also to transform themselves and their personal lives (Fisher, 1993b: 203). As Marta, the Mother in Bousquet's account, explains,

cette première manifestation à laquelle [Bousquet a] assistée, beaucoup de transformations se sont produites chez les parents de disparus...Nous avons pris conscience que nous sommes nombreuses dans le même cas, et qu'en agissant ensemble, nous pouvons espérer obtenir un résultat. Isolément, nous n'avons aucun poids face aux structures de l'État mises en place par la junte. En bloc, nous formons un groupe de pression beaucoup plus difficile à manipuler (Bousquet, 1982: 65-66).

Increasingly, confrontations with the state and the experience of political activism initiated a further transformation in the consciousness of Las Madres: politicization. Whereas the organization had emerged as an extension of their role as 'mother', in the process of sharing experiences women eventually grew "to recognize that the roots of their problems were not individual but social" (Fisher, 1993a: 31). This process was particularly spurred on by the revelations of the few released prisoners of the detention camps.

Many of us found out where [their children] were held, how they were tortured, what instruments they used, the names of the torturers, where they lived. Slowly we reconstructed the events. Every day we heard new stories and every day the news got

worse. We began to hear words like *capucha*, *submarino*, *picana*¹ and we began to piece together the full extent of the horror. All this changes you. It changes your values. It changes the way you think. We knew it was going to be hard but we knew we couldn't stop now that we were beginning to discover the truth (Hebe de Bonafini in Fisher, 1989: 66).

The horrifying scale and systematic nature of the repression that these accounts revealed meant that Las Madres had to begin to deal with the political and economic project within which the loss of their children was situated. Therefore, not only did the realization that the repression was systemic further reinforce the sense of the struggle being collective, it was also a politicizing process for many mothers who had become involved in the movement explicitly denying that their activity was 'political'. This politicization was further supported by a reevaluation of the activities of their children, whose activities they had also deemed apolitical.

Our organization grew a lot when we began to understand what our children had been fighting for, instead of saying they'd done nothing. At first we used to deny they were politically involved. 'Politics' was a dirty word for us...[However] [t]hey were taken because they made a stand against the military and against injustice, whether it was in their factories, schools or universities. We began to realise that 'politics' meant more than just the political parties. When we began to understand our children's real histories, their concern for social change, we began to make the same demands (Hebe de Bonafini in Fisher 1993b: 134-5).

Bousquet, in his intimate portrayal of Las Madres, highlights the process of increasing politicization of Marta, the mother he centres his analysis around. He notes that

[e]lle a beaucoup changé au cours de ces trois derniers mois...Elle n'est plus simplement cette mère courageuse, mais un peu naïve, décidée à soulever des montagnes pour retrouver sons fils. Elle a pris une autre dimension. Plus réfléchie, elle analyse les faits avec plus de recul, presque de froideur. Elle ne situe plus seulement son cas au niveau individuel, elle le voit comme élément du problème des disparus. Elle se politise, au meilleur sens du terme, et prend un langage de militante (Bousquet, 1982: 64).

Upon the realization that they may never find their children in the enormous repressive apparatus, and that they would require a more powerful set of strategies to deal

¹The *capucha* was the hood that prisoners were generally forced to wear during their abduction and detention; the *submarino* refers to a method of torture which involved immersion in water; *picana* refers to an electric cattle prod used as an instrument of torture.

with this system, many of the Mothers began to examine more closely the nature of the junta in order to combat it more effectively. "I began to read everything I could find so that I could understand what they were doing, everything, how they were torturing them, where. It was the only way to get the strength to fight them. And then you realize that it's not just your own sons [sic] that matter, but all the *desaparecidos*" (Hebe de Bonafini in Fisher, 1989: 91).

Many Mothers began to make the link between the repression they had experienced and the broader project of redistribution of wealth and power. For the Mothers, "[t]he torture, the murders, the genocide were for one thing: to apply an economic plan which would bring misery to the majority of people...It was the hands of the military that murdered but they were pushed by a class that always wants to dominate us" (Hebe de Bonafini in Fisher, 1989: 145).

This process occurred in the consciousness of many members of Las Madres, albeit at different rates and intensities. In this process of politicization, many of Las Madres became aware that their personal loss could not be comprehended on an individual level. As such, there would never be a satisfying answer to why one particular person, why one's own child, had disappeared; there would only be self-recriminating doubts and guilt in such an approach, with ultimately disempowering results. It must be noted that this was the route taken by many families, and that the existence of solidarity amongst parents of the disappeared was not automatically given by virtue of their common situation. The climate of fear and the intense propaganda of the military government had promoted an atmosphere of mistrust and isolation. As Marta recalls, "la solidarité entre parents de disparus n'est pas si évidente...Beaucoup refusent dans un premier temps de se mêler aux autres. Leur enfant n'a rien fait, disent-ils, et ils ne veulent pas que leur cas soit confondu avec celui de 'ceux qui ont quelque chose à se reprocher'" (Bousquet, 1982: 67). These atomistic responses speak to the powerful pressures wrought by the form of the repression to conceive of these

events as isolated, individual and deserved, thereby preventing the development of collective responses. Maria del Rosario describes the process for many individual mothers and where their grief and continuing isolation had led them: "It's a struggle which is a school and which not all mothers have been able to follow, because not all have realized that now we are fighting for something more than we were in the beginning. Many have destroyed themselves thinking about their own child, a child who still hasn't come back and isn't going to come back" (Fisher, 1989: 150). Furthermore, the fact that not all mothers of disappeared persons became politicized as such supports the notion that identity does not spring automatically from objective conditions or locations, but must be consciously constructed through political struggle, an idea which I have argued is both Marxist and post-Marxist.

Clearly, the 'prise de conscience' itself came as the result of much personal pain and growth. Las Madres came to see the enormous problem of the *desaparecidos* as a collective issue, one that had a common cause that had little to do with the individuality of themselves or their children. As Hebe de Bonafini explains, "[w]e began to realize we had to move outside our own families and struggle for all the people who had disappeared, that the explanation for the disappearance of our own children could only be found in the explanation for all the disappearances" (Fisher, 1989: 30). Furthermore, the translation of their personal loss into a collective political issue was a crucial way in which to save themselves from despair. "The reason we're all sane today is because we are all still fighting. We come here, to the Mothers' House, to talk together, to work, make banners, write, to attend to people...There are a thousand things to do every day and working together like this is a collective therapy" (Juanita de Pargament in Fisher, 1989: 151).

The evolution in consciousness experienced by Las Madres dealt not only with the wider political context, but also affected their view of themselves as women in Argentine society, a transformation tightly related to the experience of contradictions and conflict as

women began to take part in political activities not part of women's traditionally prescribed work. As we can see, Las Madres became increasingly convinced that their parental role could only be fulfilled in the streets, that the logical extension of motherhood was intimately related to political struggle. However, as their political activities increased, Las Madres were no longer exclusively in the home to perform the more traditional tasks associated with motherhood, and they began to encounter those traditional material and ideological obstacles to women's participation in the public sphere. "Domestic routines were disrupted by their absence, and husbands, children and housework became obstacles to women's participation" (Fisher, 1993a: 31). Although, as Maria del Rosario explains, men had to change too by increasing their level of participation in the maintenance in the home, the traditional sexual division of labour often meant that "[m]ost of the time we had to do both things, search for our children and look after the home" (Fisher, 1989: 59). The reaction of husbands was variable, and some were particularly steeped in the prevailing gender ideology. One Mother says that "[m]any women had to fight in secret from their husbands, especially in our society which is so *machista*" (Hebe de Bonafini in Fisher, 1989: 59). Another woman's situation speaks to the great personal price activism can exact:

My husband used to help us in the beginning. He used to support the Mothers and march with us. But then he did nothing. He never really understood our struggle. Now we don't speak to each other and when my daughter asks him why, he says it's because I only ever talk about human rights. She says that's because it's what I'm involved in. But now he believes I should be in the house all the time. I've always worked with him in the business but now he doesn't think I should do that any more either. (Dora de Baze in Fisher, 1989: 58).

Furthermore, many recognized that an impediment to their struggle--their lack of political knowledge and experience--had much to do with the traditional sexual division of labour. Women began to realize the importance of self-education so that they would be able to battle the bureaucratic impediments erected by the state, as well as challenge their discursive attempts to sanitize the *Proceso* (Fisher, 1993b: 203). However, this particular battle also meant overcoming decades of socialization which had taught them that women

were not to be concerned about things political. As Maria points out, "[m]ost of us were uneducated women, all with the same upbringing--you mustn't get involved in politics, you mustn't talk about politics, that was what the men did" (in Fisher, 1993b: 107). As they confronted the contradiction that *machismo* and the sexual division of labour had disarmed them in the performance of one of their traditional gender roles, motherhood, Las Madres began to develop a sense that they--as women--had the right and capacity to become political subjects.

Despite their increasing consciousness of the inequalities and inconsistencies of the traditional sexual division of labour, Las Madres were very reluctant to self-identify as feminists. This ambivalence was in part because Argentine feminism was widely seen to be a narrow, elitist middle-class movement which was not relevant to the concerns of working-class women (Fisher, 1993b: 205). As Hebe de Bonafini argues, "[f]eminists here are very radical. They want men out of the way and we don't agree with that...Feminists here are more middle class, more concerned with gender demands, which isn't the most important thing" (in Fisher, 1993b: 136). In contrast, the members of Las Madres tended to be drawn (but not exclusively) from the working class (since the largest group of *desaparecidos* were workers (30.2 % blue collar and 17.9% white collar) (CONADEP, 1986: 368). The fact that Las Madres tended to be working class women made them wary of traditional feminist movement, but their lack of homogeneity was also to be a source of division during the transition to democracy, issues which we will revisit in chapter 5. What this discussion points to here is the diversity of subject positions among women as well as the need to research the specific reasons why people become mobilized around certain identities, and not others, rather than to assert the functioning of false consciousness or other analogous dismissive concepts.

Therefore, the experience of collective political struggle was a transformative experience of many levels for Las Madres. Firstly, they began to search for new meanings

of motherhood. In the course of that search, women began to confront the traditional definitions of motherhood, and womanhood more generally, in Argentine society. This confrontation arose from the contradictions Las Madres began to encounter in the course of doing what they had decided was necessary in order to be good mothers. Therefore they began to transform their own consciousness of themselves as gendered beings. Finally, in the process of searching for their families, Las Madres began to question the prevailing relations of political and economic power, and as such began to challenge the rationale of the state, the institutions of the military and its relationship to civil society, and the distribution of economic power. These transformations at the level of consciousness can be readily observed in the activities and discourses of Las Madres, to which we now turn.

Strategies and Locations, Material and Discursive

The struggle of Las Madres took place in at least three 'spheres' of operation: the state, civil society, and the boundary between these two spaces. To a great extent, the challenges of the movement were directed at the false reification and separation of these spheres into rigid, self-contained and hierarchically ordered areas of social relations--the public and the private--as well as the specific content of the relations deemed to be most appropriate by the state. I will argue that the organization has had different impacts on each of the public and private spheres, as well as on the boundary which 'separates' the two.

In Argentina in the late 1970s, the nature and location of the 'enemy' was relatively unambiguous. At least in the most immediate sense, the state apparatus was clearly responsible for the organization and implementation of the repression. As well, state agencies also constituted themselves as those places where information about the *desaparecidos*, such that it was, could be sought. As such, the state became the primary target of Las Madres' struggle. However, the traditional modes of destabilizing and

questioning the legitimacy of the state--mass demonstrations, work stoppages, strikes and violence--were not at the disposal of Las Madres. Therefore, alternative strategies had to be developed.

Primarily, the strategies chosen were meant to pressure, embarrass, and humiliate the state in full view of the international community. In the face of a terrified and indifferent Argentine population, Las Madres felt they had turn to the international community for support, political action and a measure of protection. Clearly, the indifference of the domestic media closed down one important avenue of challenging the junta's monopoly over the image and interpretation of the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*. Despite attempts to use the media by taking out ads in national newspapers publicizing the plight and identities of the *desaparecidos*, Las Madres met with constant difficulties. Therefore, as they knew that clandestinity, silence and the manipulation of information were crucial aspects of the junta's ability to operate with impunity, Las Madres sought the assistance of the foreign press and international human rights groups in the dissemination of information about the repression. This appeal to the international community was based on a general assumption: that foreign governments, particularly those whose citizens had been among the *desaparecidos*, would come to the assistance of Las Madres by pressuring the Argentine government. They wrote letters to everyone. Therefore, Las Madres began to organize collections to send women abroad in order to speak to the powerful (Fisher, 1993b: 113). They visited the US State Department, Edward Kennedy, and the Pope among others, with a complete disregard for formalities (Fisher, 1993b: 113; Fisher, 1989: 76-7). However, these visits were of limited value in the sense that they received little concrete help except in a handful of individual cases (Fisher, 1989: 71, 72; Fisher 1993b: 114). This experience left many of the Mothers disillusioned as they began to understand "that governments were more interested in trade and politics than the fate of the *desaparecidos*" (Hebe de Bonafini in Fisher, 1993b: 114,

also Maria del Rosario in Fisher, 1989: 76/80).

Another important opportunity for Las Madres to place their concerns on the international agenda was the August 1977 visit of Patricia Derian, U.S. president Jimmy Carter's undersecretary of state for human rights, who was sent to investigate reports of abuses in Argentina. The fact that the Carter Administration was attempting to infuse United States foreign policy with human rights concerns--linking military and economic aid to human rights practices of recipient nations--presented a considerable opening for Las Madres' struggle over image at the international level (Fisher, 1989: 72). Derian's visit allowed the Mothers to divulge their stories to yet another international supporter, and Derian herself caught the military off guard with "her tough and accusing approach" (Fisher, 1989: 68). Although there were some happy results from this visit, with some desaparecidos returned to their families, generally the junta's response "was to repeat their denials and intensify the repression" (Fisher, 1993b: 75; Fisher, 1989: 68). Clearly, the publicizing of an alternative account of Argentine reality was not without its dire risks, and the growing effectiveness of Las Madres abroad pulled the *machista* veil away from the military's eyes, who began to see "*las locas*" as a serious threat to their project (see below the discussion of the repression of Las Madres).

Another initiative of the Carter Administration was to pressure the junta to receive a fact-finding mission from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States. Although the extensive negotiations over the arrival of the Commission gave the junta time to clean up or remove detention centres, reduce the number of prisoners through "transfers" (the euphemism used to denote execution) and eliminate evidence, the image of vast numbers of people lining up to testify in front of the OAS was haunting both nationally and internationally. Many people who were unaware of the disappearances stopped to ask questions of those waiting in line, and were "deeply disturbed by what they heard" (Bouvard, 1994: 96). The line-ups were also a site for the

exchanging of information, as many former *desaparecidos* were coming forward with their stories and were able to talk to the Mothers and give them information about their daughters and sons, as well as the conditions within the detention centres (Fisher, 1989: 82-3). However, the junta clearly recognized the potential impact of the visual image of Argentines lining up to reveal the underbelly of the Proceso, and again engaged in its own war of images. As one Mother reports, "[t]he Mothers from Mendoza went together to Buenos Aires to give our evidence to the Commission. The city was covered in posters in the colours of the Argentine flag which said "Los Argentinos somos Derechos y Humanos" [We Argentines are right and human]." (Elsa de Becerra in Fisher, 1989: 82). The government also sent out groups of young men to harass and condemn those reporting to the Commission. The junta obviously understood the impact that alternative interpretations could have on their ability to maintain their impunity.

Again, Las Madres' were to be ultimately disappointed with the results of the international community's intervention. The significant number of previously unreported cases that were detailed to the OAS Commission reflected a perhaps naive faith in the power of foreign states to affect the national politics of Argentina, the report produced by the Commission failed to have the desired international impact (Graciela de Jeger in Fisher, 1989: 83). As Marguerite Bouvard writes,

[u]nder the Carter Administration a country that was the subject of a special Inter-American Commission on Human Rights report usually was featured in a resolution by the OAS Assembly. The delegation of Mothers who went to the OAS meeting in November 1980 were sorely disappointed when the Mexican ambassador prevented the passage of a resolution, claiming that harsh criticism would have no impact on such regimes. The Mothers learned an important lesson about the behind-the-scenes bargaining that occurs in diplomacy, and they roundly criticized the OAS for its insensitivity (Bouvard, 1994: 97).

However, it was the case that the report itself condemned the regime, and copies were clandestinely smuggled into Argentina and circulated, thereby increasing domestic awareness of the junta's practices. As well, the report seemed to have an impact on the

level of disappearances, which dropped off by the end of 1980 (Bouvard, 1994: 97). In the end, though, Las Madres developed a much more nuanced understanding of the ways of international politics and grew more cynical about the direct power of foreign governments. The efforts of international solidarity groups (at the level of civil society) proved to be more effective, particularly in facilitating international travel for the Mothers and in raising financial resources for their efforts at home.

The celebrations for the World Cup of soccer in 1978 were also exemplary of the struggle against the junta's control over images and the manipulation of information. Las Madres used this international event as a conduit for publicizing information about the Argentine *Proceso* and its practices. Its international solidarity groups in Europe attempted to organize a boycott of the event in response to the uninvestigated disappearances of European nationals in Argentina. The military government, however, appealed to patriotic sentiment and made the European rejection of Argentina's repression an issue of national honour, putting "into operation all the propaganda machinery at its disposal to create a picture of peace and stability intended to disarm its foreign critics and silence internal dissent" (Fisher, 1989: 72). Meanwhile, there was a sharp increase in the number of disappearances during this period: Fisher writes that "[t]he clean-up campaign in preparation for the event had left another 367 disappeared, with at least 46 people taken during the competition itself" (Fisher 1989: 73). Las Madres, however, in the face of accusations of being unpatriotic, continued to march in the square and attempted to draw media attention to themselves during the event. International media, much less susceptible to manipulation by the junta, focussed on coverage of the Mothers rather than the Argentine victory in the final (as the media did nationally), thereby effectively challenging the junta's unitary presentation of Argentine political reality (Fisher, 1989: 74; Fisher, 1993b: 113).

International awareness of the plight of Las Madres, in addition to its effect on the Argentine state, was also a strategy to protect Las Madres from an intense wave of

repression. One Mother remarked that they were increasingly in need of international help and attention, as they felt it was all that stood between them and a wave of brutal repression which would extinguish their movement (Bousquet, 1982: 73). Such a analysis, made early on in the process of organizing, proved to be prophetic, as Las Madres suffered a wave of repression in late 1977 during which several members were disappeared, including their president, Azucena Villaflor de Vicenti. Again, in response to this wave of repression, Las Madres were quick to respond with an alternative vision of Argentina as peaceful and stable. The December 8th disappearance of these mothers did not frighten the remaining activists into silence, as they were intended. Instead, a press conference with the foreign press was held to correct the military government's version of events (Navarro, 1987: 252; Fisher, 1989: 68-9).

As the Mothers' political acumen increased, they began to recognize the value in formalizing their organization, and on 22 August 1979 they legally registered themselves as the *Asociación Civil Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. This act too, however, was tinged with inexperience and the perception of a wide horizon of possibilities, but did reflect a growing sense of the need for strategic responses to the danger of reprisals. "We developed into an organization without knowing it. We didn't know what an organization should be like, we just thought if we had something more formal it would give us better protection and it would encourage more women to join us" (Hebe de Bonafini in Fisher, 1989: 91). Their status as a legal organization would thus be proof of their existence in a system which used non-existence as a primary tactic to disempower the public and preserve the impunity of the military.

Discourse was also an important component in the struggle against the dictatorship, as their political and economic project was predicated upon massive demobilization and atomization of the working class and popular sectors. Part of this demobilization entailed the discursive construction of a unitary truth, emanating from the military and

encompassing analyses of the political, social and economic realms (Sonderéguer, 1985: 7). Las Madres' strategy entailed a fundamental challenge to the discourses used to legitimize military rule in all its aspects.

The discursive struggle of Las Madres was primarily concerned with exposing the contradictions between the military's stated principles and their repressive political, economic and cultural project. In particular, Las Madres attempted to unmask the real content in the Proceso's discourse, particularly around the sanctity of the family (Sonderéguer, 1985: 9). Whereas the junta legitimized their rule as an attempt "to reaffirm the values of the family as the base of our society', entire families, including pregnant women and children, were falling victim to the kidnappers" (Fisher, 1989: 17). According to Jo Fisher, the emergence of a collective and politicized identity based precisely on those ideas officially promulgated by the junta "presented the regime with a dilemma. Much of its claim to moral legitimacy was based on its defence of the Christian values of family and motherhood in the face of a godless communist threat from the left; the first public challenge to their rule, however, came not from the unions or political parties, but from a group of women who were appealing to those same values" (Fisher, 1993b: 109). They were exposing the hypocrisy of the military (Fisher, 1993b: 202).

The constraints of military rule in the form of constant surveillance, possible infiltration and the omnipresent threat of reprisals meant that Las Madres had to be very creative in developing their forms of organizing and resistance. Especially important was the use of the prevailing *machista* ideology about women's activities--sewing clubs, fashion shows, birthday parties and meeting in cafes as a cover for their organizational meetings. Their tactics for disseminating information included writing messages on bank notes, leaving notes or information about their missing children on buses and subway cars or in prayer books (Fisher, 1993b: 108). Not only was women's political action part of the broader struggle for women's emancipation, it was also politically strategic in a sexist

society. The fact that these were women attempting political action was initially seen by the junta as unimportant and trivial.

The junta's initial response to the weekly marches was to ignore them and when pressed by an inquiring journalist, to ridicule the Mothers, calling them *las locas de Plaza de Mayo* (the madwomen of Plaza de Mayo). The junta did not recognize the political nature of the Madres' actions and did not attempt to suppress the group. This reaction was crucial for the evolution of the movement because it gave the women the necessary time to strengthen their resolve, contact other mothers, establish an informal organization, and engage in other activities (Navarro, 1989: 251-2).

Interestingly enough, sexism and *machismo* became a politically useful cultural element in a society where the slightest indication of opposition was met with brutal retaliation. Older, matronly women were safe as their status as mother, domestic and passive, "implicitly excluded [them] from the different groups defined as 'subversives'" (Navarro, 1989: 257). Women were conscious of this invisibility, and used it to its fullest potential in slowly constructing a movement which exposed the junta, its militarism, repression and economic policies as illegitimate.

They were conscious of the public acceptance of their role as mothers and used it as a shield, deciding to march alone, without men...Until December 1977 motherhood empowered them to continue marching at a time when no public expression of dissent was allowed and to engage in other activities without risking being kidnapped, because mothers were not perceived as political subjects. Their actions were therefore politically invisible (Navarro, 1989: 257).

The politicization of motherhood not only challenged the junta's policies of repression and economic liberalization, it also resulted in an (unintended) challenge to the socially defined norms of femininity and motherhood. Thus, although the identity upon which they were mobilized--motherhood--signalled a tacit acceptance of the traditional sexual division of labour, women and their activity not only challenged traditional conceptions of women's appropriate role but also served to transform women's own consciousness about themselves. "The case of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo must surely resemble other women's movements [like the Palestinian women's movement, for example] which, without being concerned about changing the ideology of femininity, in

fact caused a transformation in women's consciousness and the female role" (Feijoó and Gogna, 1990: 91). In this way we can see how the struggle over women's practical interests can be the basis for their politicization, and subsequently, for questioning the legitimacy of the gendered division of labour which defines those practical interests. Las Madres "challenged privatization and isolation and also put an end to the myth that women are incapable to uniting, or providing mutual solidarity. Basically, the women destroyed their image of resignation and weakness" (Feijoó and Gogna, 1990: 91-92; also Mainwaring and Viola, 1984: 39). Politicization "also demonstrated that the resignation, weakness and passivity considered to be typical female characteristics are also false" (Agosin, 1987: 572). "The collective nature of the protest challenged the stereotype that characterizes women as not being able to organize" (Agosin, 1987: 572).

Furthermore, because of the specific requirements of women's role in the reproduction of the family, the forms of organization that women developed were fundamentally different from those of conventional politics. Meeting times and meeting formats were adjusted to account for the demands on women's time. Because of limited resources, Las Madres rejected bureaucratic, centralized, leadership-heavy organization in favour of "promoting internal democracy, encouraging all women to participate in leadership roles" (Fisher, 1993a: 34). Therefore, "[w]omen created loosely-knit, non-hierarchical groups, based on solidarity and mutual support. They wrote little down, and spoke in the language of their everyday lives, instead of the language of conventional politics" (Fisher, 1993a: 31).

The political activity of women during the *Proceso* also served to challenge prevailing notions of the political in two ways. The first has to do with expanding the concerns of politics beyond instrumental calculations of interest to include notions of ethics, morality and a concern for human life. Secondly, the activity of women/mothers challenged the distinction made between the male public sphere of politics and the female

sphere of the private. These challenges were enabled by the complete suspension of the party system and trade union organization, through which most demands were formerly filtered. New forms of mediation like human rights organizations emerged, and these new political actors did not pay attention to traditional delineations of public and private.

This redefinition was also possible due to the inexperience of much of the participants: "Since most of the mothers lacked political experience, they were therefore unburdened by ideological constraints or obedience to party directives or the need to replicate proven tactics. They were therefore free to use new symbols, devise appropriate tactics, and adopt actions, such as the Thursday marches, that had not been tried before in Argentina" (Navarro, 1989: 258). Also, "their lack of political experience meant they were unburdened by party differences and did not rely on traditional political methods, but were free to devise their own tactics and adopt actions that had not been used before" (Fisher, 1993b: 203). Therefore, flexibility was a function of political knowledge being gained through practice rather than ideology or theory (Agosin, 1987: 575).

New women therefore came on the scene and engaged in a struggle to redefine the conduct of politics. "In response to the authoritarian regime's attempt to define the margins of legitimacy of political action, women organized in an innovative way, based on recognition of the *political nature of family roles*" (Feijoó and Gogna, 1990: 86; italics added).

Because these new political identities were based upon the traditional role of women in Argentine society, they effected a politicization of the private. The attempt by the junta to fundamentally reshape society and reinforce the traditional sexual division of labour had a fundamentally politicizing impact on the private sphere of family and consumption:

According to the government's propaganda, the dangers we were supposed to have recently eluded stemmed from society's excessive politicization, which in turn was the result of having neglected to guarantee the existence of order, the stronghold of our society. Thus the family--the basic unit of society--was the refuge to which we had to return to avoid the dangers of disintegration and subversion....Paradoxically, the

government's attempts to privatize what was public and strengthen the family as a mechanism of social control could not prevent the family itself--now the only safe nucleus in a violent society--from becoming a refuge where opinions on the horrific situation could be exchanged and where an alternative socialization with a different discourse (both political and in opposition to the government) could flourish. The privatization of public life thus turned out to be a boomerang (Feijóo & Gogna, 1990: 84).

"The Mothers see themselves as transforming 'politics', by introducing new ethical values based on non-violence, participation and solidarity into their struggle for social justice" (Fisher, 1993b: 134). By drawing into the public sphere the concern for life and ethics, Las Madres served to transform political discourse and "radically change...the traditional parameters of political discussion" (Feijóo and Gogna, 92). "Now politics means more than political parties...We're political, but our politics are moral, ethical and with love. We believe in non-violence but we're armed with guts, determination and the truth" (Hebe de Bonafini in Fisher, 1993b: 135).

Inexperience and gender gave women a unique vantage point from which to analyze the boundaries between public and private, to debate how women's groups can "make politics [hacer politica]" to bring about social change in a democratic context, and to restructure political images and the language of politics (Jaquette, 1991: 6). For Las Madres, therefore, politics was not only about the achievement of instrumental ends, but about the symbolic and the normative dimensions of social relations (Sonderéguer, 1985: 8).

The Thursday marches of Las Madres therefore allowed for the symbolic visibilization of personal loss: "[b]y walking around the pyramid as mothers of children who had disappeared [as they could not "loiter"], they transformed their private, personal statement into a public and political act" (Navarro, 1989: 251). This action was both a symbolic and material challenge to the sexual division of labour and the militarism that many feminists have associated with masculine society.

Within Argentine society, the plaza is a public space dominated by patriarchy, just as all

of the banks, businesses, and government offices, are dominated by that same masculine power. To this masculine domain, outside of their private and traditional settings, their homes, and their daily battle for bread to feed their families, the women added their presence (Agosin, 1987: 572).

In other words, "through a collective action born out of the sexual division of labour (caring for children), Las Madres violated that very division. They left the domestic sphere and confronted the de facto government in the very place [the Plaza de Mayo] that symbolizes political power and, it could be said, 'naked' power" (Feijoó and Gogna, 1990: 92).

The traditional forms of organizing political activity also did not suit Las Madres as they seemed not to reflect the deeply personal aspect of their struggle. Hebe de Bonafini's comments explain: "In the other [human rights] organizations we didn't feel close to each other, there was always a desk between us, it was always something more bureaucratic. In the square we all felt equal" (Fisher, 1993b: 107).

This freedom to experiment politically was insisted upon due to negative past experiences of women's movements affiliated with institutionalized organization. "We have had very painful experiences with political leaders', the Mothers would say. They were disenchanted with politics, fearful of manipulation and mistrustful when faced with the opportunism of political leaders. Coupled with this, or perhaps because of it, they proposed giving a new meaning to politics: 'we do not defend ideologies, we defend life'" (Feijoó and Gogna, 1990: 94). Prior to 1983, it was possible for women's organizations to take an unequivocally anti-political and ethical stance due to the nature of governance--dictatorship. Politics was an obviously dirty game, and women meant to stand outside of it and demand that human life and social rights be respected. The reluctance to engage with institutions or to become fully institutionalized allowed for a great deal of political flexibility and spontaneity in terms of tactics and strategy; a radical edge was thus preserved.

Conclusions

Las Madres clearly have much to tell us about new kinds of resistance in the late 20th century. In particular, by examining the process by which Las Madres came to understand the fate of the children, the nature of the political-economic system, and their own capacity for political action, we must conclude that a great deal of attention must be paid to what motivated people to resist. We have seen that while the Mothers' consciousness was derived from their direct material experiences, it is also important to note that there was always ongoing debate--internally and with other would-be participants in the struggle--over the meaning of the events of the late 1970s and early 80s. The Mothers' mostly working-class origins, which was part of why their children disappeared in the first place, their common experience of motherhood, the way the *machismo/marianismo* system affected their roles in Argentine society, and the practices of the junta all provided this common material base upon which they could connect. Moreover, Las Madres' experience of the junta and its practices led them to an awareness of both gender and class discrimination, and ultimately to the development of a wider social consciousness that they admittedly did not possess before. However, from the testimonies of the Mothers we can see that most similarly situated women did not react to these circumstances by taking political action. In other words, the contention that identity and meaning itself is a site of struggle is confirmed by this case.

Also, the strategies adopted by the Mothers do not exactly fit the post-Marxist theoretical paradigm. Las Madres focused their attention on both the state and civil society, and the majority of their actions were designed to challenge the authority of the state through international pressure. However, the way that this was effected was primarily through the struggle over image and meaning, both the meaning of actual events and the meaning of politics itself. This, combined with the rejection of traditional forms of political organization, the focus on non-negotiable values, and new kinds of political subjects and

consciousness served to make women's organizing during the junta easily characterizable as new social movement activity. What is not clear is whether the theories that we have at hand to explain this activity are sufficiently complex or nuanced. This theoretical problem will be further explored as we turn to an examination of the contradictions and obstacles that Las Madres confronted during the transition to democracy, aspects of the process of resistance which remain unexplained by both Marxist and post-Marxist theory.

Chapter 5: Contradictions in the Transition to Democracy: Las Madres 1983-1989

The previous two chapters elucidate the ability of new political actors to emerge under the conditions of a severe and violent--albeit contradictory--structural context. Although it is clear that the *Proceso* profoundly constrained the development, flourishing and effectiveness of many collective (and individual) identities, as with all power structures it was neither omnipotent nor free of contradiction where people could find spaces to resist. As we have seen, the economic and repressive policies of the *Proceso* primarily targeted persons aged 16-35, people who were not merely unionists, university students, journalists, human right lawyers, or doctors working in the *villas miserias*, but also sons and daughters of mothers. In a social context where the value and importance of familial relations was paramount--both in terms of the traditional gendered relations of power and in the *Proceso's* own Catholic, traditionalist discourse--it seems that the resistance of mothers *qua* mothers is not incredible, even in the face of extreme danger. As such, the contradiction between the *Proceso's* own practices and discourses was felt very deeply by mothers who were situated at this intersection, and moved them to construct a powerful movement which exerted (at least in its international dimension) a great deal of public pressure against the Argentine junta.

However, the movement towards democracy, with its own contradictions and openings, has not seemed to bode well for Las Madres as a political actor. Democracy has meant an abrupt transformation in the terrain on which social movements must operate, and although Las Madres has had an important role in moving to that terrain, it has had less effect on the shape of that terrain. While the organization undeniably led the anti-authoritarian protests in 1982-3, acting particularly as an ethical vanguard, and was also a salient radical voice in the subsequent struggles over the trials of the juntas, the public aspect of the movement has declined over the course of the 1980s. Las Madres as a

collective identity and a source of emotional support continues to be important for the individuals involved, no doubt a fact of political importance; however, the impact of economic instability, debt, and the 'need' to seek compromises with capital and a still strong (if defensive) military has significantly curtailed the ability of Las Madres to affect state policy on the issue of human rights abuses.

This chapter is therefore an attempt to understand this decline in the public power of the movement in the context of more traditional democratic politics. We will begin by examining the nature of the transition to democracy, and will see that the forces which led to the demise of the military regime--internal contradictions within the military as well as economic crisis and the withdrawal of social support by agrarian and financial capital--resulted in an abrupt and unplanned transition with many issues unresolved for the period of consolidation. We will see that the nature of the economic crisis--importantly international in character--and the continuing ability of an increasingly defensive military to threaten intervention or rebellion severely constrained the ability of Las Madres to force desirable results in the process of accounting for human rights abuses as well as in their quest for a deepening of the meaning and practice of democracy. We will then examine how these political difficulties affected the internal workings of the movement itself, and assess whether Las Madres remain salient at all in the Argentine political landscape.

The Fall of the *Proceso*: Causes and Processes

The confident exit of a military government usually allows the outgoing junta to set the terms of the democratic transition to political and civil society. However, in the case of Argentina, the armed forces left government "disunited, demoralized and incapable of dictating terms to the new democratic leaders" (Pion-Berlin, 1991: 550). However, while David Pion-Berlin argues that a military in disarray allows significant space for the civilian government to deal with the economy and civil-military relations (he ascribes failures to

"the decision-making skills of democratic leaders" (Pion-Berlin, 1991: 545)), the following will demonstrate that in fact the economic and political legacies of military rule during the *Proceso* weighed quite heavily on the possible outcomes of the transition. As such, we must attempt first to elucidate the causes of the transition in order to understand its consequences.

Although many have argued that resistance was key in the downfall of the *Proceso*, we must also recognize the role of internal divisions in the military in the setting of the stage for the resurgence of civil society. For instance, even though the 'war against subversion' was highly coordinated and ideologically supported by many in the military, the division of labour resulted in some serious internal divisions. As Carina Perelli points out, a small sector of the officers conducted the highly decentralized and irregular war against subversion and "had sometimes broader powers of life and death than a normal senior military officer". Moreover, not only did 'dirty war' officers have more power over the civilian population than some of their formal superiors, they also had some power over these superiors as well. As Mark Osiel writes, "[t]he easy alternation between open and surreptitious methods, and the interpenetration of official and clandestine bureaucracies which this entailed, involved frequent violations of the formal chain of command. Junior officers who held important posts in the clandestine apparatus often found themselves giving orders to their nominal superiors in the chain of command" (Osiel, 1986: 141). Because of the existence of this special cadre, the gap in power "was to prove a major cleavage during the transition process and a significant frontier of military memory" (Perelli 1992: 427). Perelli argues further that, with their engagement in politics, the military "tends to lose its monolithic character. Within the military organization, a form of political system, with factions and 'parties', begins to develop. This tendency puts the very existence of the institution in danger" (Perelli, 1990: 46-7). In light of these practices, Perelli is right in saying that "[n]obody seemed to realize at the time the kind of wreckage

of the principles of discipline, obedience and hierarchy the dirty war and its aftermath would cause inside the military institution--how it would divide and oppose officers belonging to different generations or having followed divergent career paths" (Perelli, 1992: 427-8).

These internal divisions took the form of ideological and personal rivalries, particularly over the issue of liberalization and its sagacity. Starting in 1978, this emerged as a conflict between Viola and Galtieri, the latter backed by hardliners "who considered any transition dangerous and who resented Viola's overtures toward civilian political groups" (Perelli, 1992: 428). The internal coup that ensued made public internal divisions in the military public at a time of "economic crisis and social decay" and created an opening for public expression of popular discontent (Perelli, 1992: 428)

What these events point to is the larger question about the contradictions inherent in military intervention in government. As Munck points out, "when an institution such as the military assumes functions it was not designed for such as government, the prolonged exercise of those functions is bound to generate contradictions and ultimately threaten its internal coherence and ability to fulfil its prime function: warfare" (Munck, 1989: 78).

In addition to the internal contradictions of military rule, and closely related to the conflicts over a confused and unsuccessful economic policy, the social base of the *Proceso*--agrarian and financial capital--began to withdraw its support from the junta (Pion-Berlin, 1985: 56). In general, there is usually an ambiguous and tenuous relationship between military regimes and the dominant classes (or class fractions): although, as Munck argues, the military usually intervenes in government in order to defend the structures and relationships which make capital accumulation possible, the dominant class is also, in the process, denied many of its economic and political prerogatives (Munck, 1989: 82). Insofar as the alliance between capital and the military was, in Argentina, primarily an instrumental (rather than organic) one, and that the nature of the tradeoff involved for

capital the relinquishing of direct political power, when the military begins to falter at the one task for which it occupies the state--economic restructuring for growth--the dominant classes come to reconsider their support for the regime (Munck, 1989: 82). As Cesar Caviedes argues, the acquiescence of the middle and owning classes can only be counted on if a viable economic model has been produced. For these sectors,

the military offer an environment of financial and social peace agreeable to national and international investors on the assumption that the benefits will eventually be reaped by the whole population. If the expectations of those two segments of the national societies are met, the rulers need worry little about other demands, that is to say, the political freedom and the vindication of the masses. Since support for authoritarian regimes dwindles in periods of economic strain, the military dread such recessions more than internal opposition and armed resistance. It is clear, in this scheme, that the 'passivity' of certain privileged sectors of the population can be taken as granted only as long as the authoritarian regime provides them with material benefits; but as soon as these are withheld, the system will find its validity contested and its legitimacy doubted by its former supporters, which--with great probability--will lead to its final collapse. (Caviedes, 1984: 140)

It is in this vein that Munck argues that businesspeople can often play a crucial role in liberalization--not because they have a deep-seated democratic impulse, but because their support for military regimes is contingent upon success (Munck, 1989: 83).

In the Argentine case, therefore, the early 1980s witnessed the failure of the monetarist experiment. As Pion-Berlin points out, "[t]he most serious economic indictment of the *Proceso* was that it had been unable to show significant improvements even on indicators it--rather than its critics--considered to be crucial" (Pion-Berlin, 1991: 550). In the last year of the *Proceso*, inflation rose to 343%, such that "price volatility seriously undercut the government's efforts to stimulate growth or lure foreign investors back to Argentina" (Pion-Berlin, 1991: 550). Moreover, despite the junta's attempt to cut state expenditures (especially in areas of social provision), public debt rose to 15% of GDP in the 1980-83 period, outstripping even the record of past Peronist governments (Pion-Berlin, 1991: 551). Even the firing of Martinez de Hoz by General Viola could not staunch the outflow of support, and "representatives of the productive sectors began to unite against

finance capital" (Fisher, 1989: 110). Fisher further explains that

[i]n 1981 the *Sociedad Rural Argentina* publicly protested over the economic plight of Argentine farms and the Argentine Industrial Union called for measures to halt the destruction of the production apparatus. There was a wave of protest from the hard-hit regional producers. The era of *plata dulce* came to an abrupt end and with it middle-class acceptance of a regime they were prepared to tolerate just as long as they were able to satisfy their taste for conspicuous consumption (Fisher, 1989: 110).

In this sense, it was the increasing confusion in the ranks of the capital-military alliance over the issue of economic policy which opened up the political space for opposition (Pion-Berlin, 1985: 71; Perelli, 1992: 428). Labour discontent was therefore reactivated, and as such "[i]t was the military's economic record, not human rights, which became the focus for the first mass resistance to the rule of the juntas" (Fisher, 1989: 109). In this way, the mass character of labour struggles leads Munck to assert that "the organized trade union movement is the core or backbone of popular resistance to the military project" (Munck, 1989: 89).¹ From 1979-80, working-class organizations began to reappear on the national political scene after a conspicuous absence, since the lack of support from union leaderships had resulted in working class struggle being localized (taking place at the factory level), isolated (as they were not supported by regional, national or solidarity strikes), and defensive (in that the issues at stake tended to focus on fending off the impacts of the junta's monetarist economic policy which entailed 'super-exploitation' of workers) (Munck et al, 1987: 214). Evidence of the economic losses of labour is provided by Peralta-Ramos, who demonstrates that the industrial real wage had

¹ It should be noted here that Munck cautions readers not to make assumptions about the level of demobilization of the labour movement, even though they were seriously disarticulated by the military project. He bases this claim on the fact that, prior to the Proceso, the Argentine labour movement was an organic one, "well rooted in the workplace and in society, with a representative, albeit bureaucratic, leadership" (Munck, 1989: 88). As such, the legacy of "a long history of labour militancy and the dense social network uniting the workplace and the working-class community led to a considerable capacity for resistance" (Munck, 1989: 99). While this may hold true to some extent, Munck does not explain the quiescence of the labour leadership during the first 4 years of the Proceso, nor does he inquire into the salient divisions between leadership and rank and file, or right and left in the movement in this volume (cf. Jelin, 1979).

dropped dramatically in the first few months after the coup, by some 45% (Peralta-Ramos, 1992: 72). Moreover, the deterioration had been most serious over the years 1975-6, falling by an average of 32.5% over the period, "and remained practically stagnant from then until 1982" (Peralta-Ramos, 1992: 86). In the face of such economic pressure, rank and file workers at the factory level "had from the start practiced discreet forms of protest against the regime, through go-slows or work-to-rules" ² and had also begun to protest human rights abuses in conjunction with Las Madres, culminating in April 1979 when these workers organized the first general strike since the coup (Fisher, 1989: 110, 113). The resurgence of protest linking economic and political issues led to the reconstitution of the *Confederación General de Trabajadores* (CGT) by the Peronist union bureaucracy in 1981. "On 7 November 50,000 white- and blue-collar workers joined a demonstration calling for 'Peace, Bread and Work'" (Fisher, 1989: 110) and "on the eve of the Malvinas takeover in 1982 labour was in an openly offensive mode" (Munck, 1989:99). This organizing in the face of confusion in the self-styled hegemonic bloc became overwhelming in the wake of the Malvinas war. As Munck writes,

[a]fter the [Malvinas conflict in 1982], a veritable flood of pent-up demands were pressed in persistent and widespread labour protests. There was a normalization of trade union affairs as part of the global move towards military disengagement, but this soon overflowed the official channels. This pressure from below led towards a new general strike in December 1982, which the union leadership called partly to defuse the groundswell of protest. Two more general strikes in 1983 placed the labour movement firmly back on the political map (Munck, 1989: 89).

What was the role of the human rights movements, particularly Las Madres, in the breakdown of authoritarian rule? There is no doubt that the movement posed an ideological challenge to the legitimacy of the *Proceso*, and was most successful in building international public opposition to the regime. In this period the international pressure on the government--undeniably built through the activities of Las Madres and other human

² See Munck et al, 1987, Chapter 15, for a full and detailed account of the actual struggles waged by local rank and file workers and activists during this period of national union quiescence.

rights organizations--was weighing heavily on the junta. As Fisher writes, "the United Nations was pressing for details of over 7000 cases of disappearances and in 1980 Amnesty International published a report on the secret detention camps based on the testimonies of former detainees" (Fisher, 1989: 111). Moreover, the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1980 to Adolfo Esquivel, an Argentine human rights activist, and the nomination of Las Madres for this prize that same year, significantly raised the international profile of events in Argentina and the struggle against the dictatorship. The international and domestic publicization of these events was extremely difficult for the junta to control, despite their best efforts to do so. Finally, the reduction of U.S. economic aid to Argentina due to continuing human rights abuses had a considerable psychological affect on the regime (Munck, 1989: 77). Therefore, Carter's 'human rights-based foreign policy', although quickly abandoned by Reagan in 1981, helped at least to "create the space for a coherent opposition movement to the regime" (Munck, 1989: 77).

However, despite the growth of a mass movement organized around repudiation of the dictatorship and human rights abuses, the leaderships of many organizations--the Church, the political parties, and the trade union leadership--were reluctant to throw themselves wholeheartedly behind the issues of human rights. To some great extent, this reluctance stemmed from their own complicity (or at least silence) during the *Proceso*, as well as the active support by some of the 'war against subversion'. This stance of the political leadership towards Las Madres (and human rights generally) is important here, in that it forms an important part of the democratic political context when these actors take on a more important role in the channelling of political demands. As such, the equivocation of the political leadership explains part of the difficulties faced by Las Madres in getting their political demands incorporated into government human rights policy. The mutual alienation of these sectors was to mean that Las Madres had little access to the sources of institutionalized power in the post-dictatorship context, an exclusion which eventually led

to the marginalization of the movement in Argentine political debate and decision-making.

Importantly, the Catholic Church in Argentina condemned neither the *Proceso* nor the 'war against subversion'. To a significant extent, the church hierarchy, historically very close to the state, was complicit in the military's project, providing moral support and theological justifications for military officers carrying out atrocities. The Church continued to supply the military with chaplains, and there are several accounts of the active participation of priests in torture sessions and military operations. The Church also performed the ideological function of justification to churchgoers from their position on the pulpit. For instance, days after the coup in 1976, the president of the Argentine Episcopal Conference, Msr Tortolo, announced that "'the hour of the great rebirth has begun' and urged all Argentines to 'cooperate positively' with the new regime" (Fisher, 1989: 23). Another potent example of the Church's promulgation of the moral universe of the junta is the mass given for the *desaparecidos* at the request of the Mothers: "When we asked for a mass for the *desaparecidos* they gave us a sermon on the morality of young people" (Aida de Suárez in Fisher, 1989: 111). As Fisher elaborates, this refers to a service held in the Basilica de San Francisco in December 1978: "The Mothers expected comfort and support. Instead the priest gave a sermon on the dangers of young people associating with bad company, drugs and guerillas" (Fisher, 1989: 125, n.8). Finally, the Church acted in an overtly political way by using its influence to "discourage individual and collective action" as well as functioning "as a channel of communication between the victims and the agents of repression" (Fisher, 1989: 112). It is interesting to point out that the position of the Argentine Catholic Church on human rights stands out as an exception in the Latin American continent. In Chile, for example, it is well known that the Church set up the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad* in order to assist organizations coordinate the search for the *desaparecidos* (Chuchryk, 1989: 158). The Salvadoran Church under Romero was also very active in the documentation of human rights abuses and the provision of support for

human rights organizations. While it is true that the hierarchies of most Latin American Churches had very conservative orientations and were aligned with the traditional land-owning oligarchy, the influence of liberation theology on rank-and-file priests and nuns was nevertheless profound. It would seem that the Argentine Church was the least penetrated by such influences, as the widespread silence of clergy and the (actual or ideological) participation of priests in the carrying out of the repression demonstrates. Emilio Mignone argues that the specific history of the relationship between Church and State in Argentina, and in particular the state's control of the appointment of bishops as well as its direct financial support of Catholic worship, accounts for the quiescence of the 1970s and 80s (Mignone, 1988: 76-77, 87).

All of these activities shaped the way the Church participated in the transition to and consolidation of democracy. Even during the transition, the Church continued to issue lukewarm statements questioning the regime. For instance, in May 1981, the Conference of Argentine Bishops finally issued a document questioning the *methods* of the junta's economic and repressive policies, but insisted that a distinction must be made between "the justifications for the 'war against subversion' and the methods used in this war" (Fisher, 1989: 112). In other words, the Church fundamentally agreed with the principles of the junta, even if it eventually found the tactics distasteful. This position of the Church was extremely alienating for Las Madres, and despite constant attempts to elicit public and private support from the Church, the organization eventually came to realize that this route of channelling their demands was closed off to them.

The same barriers became evident in Las Madres' dealings with the political parties, who had also taken a stance of silent complicity during the *Proceso*. In the lead up to the resurgence of mass resistance in the early 1980s, parties continued to call for moderation and the exercise of caution. Although, in response to the political openings in the wake of economic confusion in the ranks of the junta, the parties formed the *Multipartidaria*

coalition to call for free elections, the parties involved "refused the Mothers' request to be included in the talks. Compared with its own modest proposals for change, the Mothers and their demands were seen to be a political liability. Its first document called for moderate changes in economic policies and a phased transition to constitutional rule. It made only a brief reference to human rights and avoided any direct reference to the *desaparecidos*" (Fisher, 1989: 112). The statements of Mothers are revealing regarding both the reluctance of parties to include ethical principles in their platforms as well as the contempt that Las Madres began to develop regarding 'traditional parties'. As María del Rosario explains, Las Madres' position vis-à-vis the parties was informed by a sense of the absolute morality of their own cause:

We knocked on [the parties'] doors many times and they wouldn't let us in. We told them that they couldn't accept the inheritance of 30 000 *desaparecidos* because it is a crime against humanity, that they had to act responsibly, and that they had to demand a reply from the military. We told them that anyone who remained silent was an accomplice of the military, because no party could claim to be a winner if it didn't demand justice for the horrendous crimes that were committed here (Fisher, 1989: 113).

Moreover, even in the face of 45 000 people in the streets protesting the military's self-amnesty, the 3 principal parties of the *Multipartidaria* refused to participate, limiting their repudiations to official declarations (Fisher, 1989: 123). This equivocation of the parties has led several mothers to hold the view that while "we were always fighting for the truth...none of them want the truth. The only thing political parties want is power" (Fisher, 1989: 112).

The trade union bureaucracy, largely silent in the face of disappearances of significant numbers of their (leftist or radical) membership,³ reluctantly began to voice

³ As mentioned previously, CONADEP's figures indicate that 30.2% of the disappeared reported to the Commission were blue-collar workers; 17.9% were white-collar workers (CONADEP, 1986: 368). Fisher writes that 54% percent of the disappeared were members of the "working class", a figure which could encompass both workers and students, as well as housewives and so forth (Fisher, 1989: 110). In any case, approximately 50% of the disappeared were in some way linked to the "working class" as identified by the junta.

political opposition to the junta when pressure from their membership became too much to bear. Like the Church and the political parties, the trade union bureaucracy had been significantly silent throughout the duration of the military government, some due to their legitimate fear of being disappeared themselves, but many because they agreed with the military's decision to eliminate the left-wing opposition. Like the Peronist movement generally, the unions were split ideologically, and the same activists who posed a threat to Argentina's capitalist social system also challenged the power that union leaders had through calls for internal democracy and shop steward activism (see Jelín, 1979 for elaboration). This tacit support for the dictatorship left the leadership of the *Confederación General de Trabajadores* (CGT) (except for one) untouched by the *Proceso's* repressive practices (Fisher, 1989: 113). One Mother characterizes the CGT leadership's position in this way: "The military didn't touch the CGT...It was one of the most powerful organizations in the country and it did nothing for the workers in their unions that disappeared. There were some strikes and they said the CGT was against the military, but they were strikes from the grassroots, pressuring the CGT to take a position" (Aida de Suárez in Fisher, 1989: 113). The first nationwide demonstration organized by the CGT to denounce the military on issues of human rights only took place in March 1982, and even at this juncture the presence of the Mothers was begrudgingly accepted (Fisher, 1989: 114).⁴ Like the *Multipartidaria*, the CGT refused to participate in the demonstration condemning the Law of National Pacification and the amnesty it provided to the military (Fisher, 1989: 123). However, with increasingly vocal discontent in the rank and file of organized workers linking up with the human rights struggle and organizing political action

⁴ As Munck details, throughout the period there were general, regional and local strikes (the latter predominates) despite the fact that such actions were illegal; however, the majority of these demonstrations were focused on wage and economic demands, and did not begin to link up with the human rights movements until late 1981 (Munck, 1987: 219-223; see also table on 229 detailing the cause for strikes from 1976-1980).

independent of the leadership, and the flood of international support for Las Madres, by the end of 1982 "[t]he human rights movement had made the transition to a mass movement capable of mobilizing hundreds of thousands in the streets." (Munck, 1989: 95).

The military's response to these multiple crises, rather than retrench the 'war against subversion', was in effect to create an external security threat through its takeover of the Malvinas Islands. Very clearly, the Malvinas conflict was "a way to divert Argentine public opinion from the political and economic crisis and of rallying all sectors under the banner of a national claim to sovereignty over the long-lost islands" (Perelli, 1992: 429). The war was seen as a way to unite the armed forces around their military purpose, but was also a national-populist method of appealing to the increasingly militant working class by encouraging them to identify as 'Argentine' (Munck, 1989: 78). This attempt to create social consensus at home revolved around an assumption that the British would not actually engage in hostilities with Argentina. When the 'recovery' of the Malvinas failed, the military regime experienced a significant loss in legitimacy, particularly because it was seen to fail at the task which it was structurally supposed to perform--win wars. (Munck, 1989: 95) The aftermath of this defeat was an immense discrediting of the Argentine military institution, and an exacerbation of the internal conflicts in the armed forces, now focussed on the competency of those who had run the war, and in the face of demonstrations the junta was forced to lift restrictions on political parties and call elections for December 1983. In other words, after its defeat at the hands of the British, "the military government imploded" (Corradi, 1987: 141).

In light of these events, the only thing the military could do was attempt to protect itself from the coming reprisals. Therefore, the junta issued two documents; the first, released in April 1983, was the "Final Document of the Military Junta on the War Against Subversion and Terrorism", which denied all responsibility for 'excesses' and praised the military for its conduct. The second was the Law of National Pacification (22.924),

promulgated in September 1983, which was "an attempt to amnesty all those involved in the repressive apparatus" and protect them from criminal prosecution (Perelli, 1992: 429, also Fisher, 1989: 122).

Therefore, particularly due to the unforeseen collapse of the military regime, Argentina's transition was an abrupt, hurried, inorganic and unnegotiated one. That the military was unable to secure protection from retribution for themselves, despite their best efforts at self-amnesty, signalled the beginning of a period of conflict both over the account of the activities of the junta, and the nature of the justice to be meted out for systematic state repression. "Henceforth, the isolation of the military from the majority of civil society would only grow. Far from adapting to the new democratic conditions, the armed forces turned their back on civil society, closed ranks in a rigid defense of their interests and vindicated their past actions with a mixture of resentment and patriotic melancholy" (Corradi, 1987: 141). Moreover, the economic crisis created by the monetarist project was to put significant constraints on the civilian government, and required them to negotiate with capital in order to reconstruct the industrial base and maintain conditions for profitability. Most importantly, the need to reestablish legitimacy, consent, and social peace as conditions for the reinvigoration of economic growth meant that the sources of political conflict which remained after the *Proceso* had to be resolved in a way that would, above all else, preserve stability. Clearly, the search for stability was made all the more urgent in the face of the *Proceso*'s failed economic experiment. In this context, a complete accounting of the human rights abuses, a bringing to justice of the perpetrators of these atrocities, and the construction of a democracy based on more than procedural rules, was going to prove difficult.

Post-Transition Argentina: The Problems of Consolidation

Therefore, for Argentines, the transition to democracy transpired against the

backdrop of an exhausted, alienated, divided and cynical civil society which had just endured a physical and psychological attack of major proportions by some of its own (Winant, 1987:172-3). Democratization occurred, but many unresolved issues remained, the solutions for which presented some serious contradiction and therefore obstacles for consolidation.

A crucial domestic obstacle to the consolidation of democracy faced by Raúl Alfonsín in 1983 was the need to restore economic growth in the context of a very divided class system in which all fractions were battling to redress the perceived and real injustices each had suffered. This conflict continued to be both inter-class and intra-class. As we have seen, Argentine capital had never been united historically, with industrialists favoured by the post-WWII corporatist regime of Perón at the expense of the landed oligarchy and those sectors of multinational capital allied with it. As the *Proceso* demonstrated vividly, the landed oligarchy possessed bases of coercive power which it was willing to employ if the economic environment created by the state proved unfavourable to the export industries which they dominated. Hence, any industrial policy in the fragile post-dictatorship period had to strike a balance between reindustrialization for domestic consumption and promotion of agricultural exports.

A primary reason for seeking reindustrialization was to respond to the embattled but still vocal organized industrial labour movement. Again, as has been discussed, labour in Argentina had historically been united and relatively close to sources of decision-making power under Perón, and rewarded for this unity with a relatively high real wage and standard of living. Although the experience of the *Proceso* and the electoral defeat of the Peronist party in 1983 caused splits in the trade union movement over how to proceed as an opposition force, it remained an important actor as it retained the capacity to mobilize workers against the government. (Munck, et al, 1987: 224-225; McGuire, 1992) Thus, as the transition from military to civilian government was made in 1983, labour spearheaded

renewed demands for restoration of industrial employment, real wages, living standards, housing conditions, and educational and health facilities, demands "which capital could ill afford to meet, but which is required for the continued stability of capitalist rule in Argentina" (Munck, et al, 1987: 223)

To compound the challenge of making distributional decisions in a context of potentially violent class conflict was the presence of a large foreign debt contracted primarily during the military government's tenure. Susan George points out that at least one-fifth of Argentina's debt burden can be "traced directly to military spending." (George, 1989: 22) Monica Peralto-Ramos demonstrates that during the "fiscally conservative" years of the *Proceso*, the deficit-to-GDP ration had risen from 8.8% (1975-80) to 15.7% by 1983. (Peralto-Ramos, 1992: 87) George goes on to explain that debt was not only contracted by the government in order to purchase non-productive weaponry, but also by private individuals to participate in profitable speculative investments which depended upon a greatly overvalued peso. Hence, the debt contracted by Argentinians during the *Proceso* was not invested in productive industries, but was used to generate quick financial capital for reinvestment in other speculative ventures around the globe. The problem was greatly exacerbated by the policy of the government to take responsibility for private speculators' debt. The burden of foreign debt

which had drastically diminished the resources available to the state and could only increase the difficulty of satisfying the various sectoral demands by definitively changing the rules that had thus far governed state management of subsidies. The traditional pattern of alternate subsidies to the agricultural and industrial sectors would now be drastically transformed under the pressure of a new factor, interest payments on the foreign debt. The scarcity of resources could only fan the flames of the struggle among business sectors for the appropriation of income, and runaway inflation was one more manifestation of the intensity of the social conflicts that had taken root in the country (Peralto-Ramos, 1992: 87).

It was in this context that the Alfonsín government attempted to restore legitimacy to democratic institutions and processes, with a rhetorical stand on economic restructuring calling for a distribution of effort according to financial resources. However, consistent

with its attempt to promote national reconciliation, the government also included a commitment to agricultural price supports and lower export duties for the benefit of the landed oligarchy, whose sense of exclusion since the advent of Peronism had culminated in violent retribution, and whose commodities were central to the earning of foreign exchange necessary for debt repayment. (Peralta-Ramos, 1992: 88) This policy position inevitably proved unsustainable, being rife with contradictions which could not be maintained in the face of conflict between industrial and agricultural capital and the massive foreign debt. Alfonsín's attempt to walk a tightrope between domestic redistribution and industry, and export industry and international financial interests ultimately ended in failure as the illusion of state voluntarism faded away.

The issue of the relationship between labour, state, capital and international economic institutions was not the only issue at stake in the post-dictatorship transition, however. As Munck points out, "the precise manner in which the human right issue is dealt with during the democratization process will dictate to a large extent the nature of the new democracies" (Munck, 1989: 92). In the case of Argentina, the newly elected government felt that making political compromises with the military over the issue of human rights was a necessary element in insuring future peace in the civil-military relationship.

The guiding thread of the government's approach to human rights in the post-dictatorship period was to attempt to punish those responsible while preserving the military as an institution (Perelli, 1992: 430-1). It is important to understand how Alfonsín came to view this trajectory as the most effective, particularly after being elected on a pro-human rights platform. Alfonsín had undeniably adopted the discourse of the human rights movement in his campaign. In effect, he had "based his campaign on a systematic condemnation of the human rights abuses committed by the military" and openly declared that he would not honour the self-amnesty of the military (Perelli, 1992: 430). Osiel argues

that Alfonsín subsequently made human rights policy almost unilaterally, that is, independent of the Congress and with "only routine consultations with the new military leadership" (Osiel, 1986: 142). However, it is clear that the resulting policy was not formed in a vacuum, but in accordance with Alfonsín and his advisors' interpretation of the interests of both the main protagonists--the military and the human rights organizations--as well as the potential costs of ignoring these interests. It is also clear that in this field of interests the government found those of the military most compelling--particularly in terms of the specificities of human rights policy and its enforcement. In other words, Alfonsín soon found it impossible to implement policy based on these principles due to the need for "compromise and negotiation" with the military, and he thusly "reinterpreted them pragmatically" (Jelín, 1987: 29).

Perelli attributes this "political realist" attitude to the reversion of the political class to its traditional *modus operandi* "elite negotiation...raison d'etat, and the justification of political actions on exclusively political arguments". The resulting policies of pragmatism--and the notion that the legacies of military rule and the transition were negotiable--reflecting the fact that "probably no sector of society minimized to as great an extent the changes that had taken place in civil society, on the one hand, and in the military, on the other, during the *de facto* regime" (Perelli, 1990: 40).

In making policy, the government had to contend with two diametrically opposed interpretations of the recent past: that of the military, and that of Las Madres and the human rights organizations. For the military's part, as we saw from their declarations in the report on the 'war against subversion', they remained unified in the notion that the mission they had undertaken was just, that methods used to achieve their aims, be they termed 'atrocities' or 'excesses', were performed under orders and therefore, due to the integrity of the chain of command, were not subject to prosecution. According to the military's logic,

a soldier could be prosecuted only if he had undertaken actions on his own, unbeknownst to senior officers and out of step with operational guidelines. Under these circumstances few if any could have committed any wrongdoings, since commanders were thought to have firm control over their subordinates, and since the system had fully authorized repressive, counter-subversive operations. Thus, those who committed atrocities were as easily pardonable as those who did not (Pion-Berlin, 1991: 561).

This position on the 'unprosecutability' of military personnel revolves around a philosophical position through which the military "rejects all individualism that posits citizens confronted with the law instead of the soldier-link upholding the notion of the duty to follow orders. The figure of the soldier excludes the citizen; as a result, it is inconceivable that what is done by men in uniform can be judged outside the barracks" (Cheresky, 1987: 159).

The implications of military identity and the possession of an organic ideology combined with the experience of political rule have serious implications for the transition to democracy. As Perelli argues, the articulation of a set of corporatist values--which sees the military as an entity unified around a set of institutionalized values (honour and loyalty)--that promoted "a feeling of 'we' self-perceived as superior to the 'other'--the civilian with the experience of the daily exercise of political power produces a notion of the military as "quasi-autonomous political actor" (Perelli, 1990: 45) with a global vision for society. This "ideological inflation" is "marked by the search for a totalizing vision that is capable of unifying the direction of the social process" (Perelli, 1990: 46). Alfonsín and the Radical Party were seen by the military as a serious threat to their institutional integrity, and proceeded to refuse any of Alfonsín's overtures, particularly his offer to allow for an internal purging of the military away from public scrutiny (Corradi, 1987: 142).

As we have seen from Chapter 4, the position of Las Madres--given their position as the parents of *desaparecidos*--was one of an uncompromising ethical vision. In contrast to the political class, whose guiding logic was a pragmatic attempt to 'balance' interests, Las Madres held that on the issue of human rights there could be no compromise.

According to Perelli's characterization of the post-dictatorship period, the human rights debate was, for Las Madres, one of "uncontestable founding social and political principles" based on the philosophical premise of the absolute nature of Truth, Life, and Justice. For the Mothers, in order for a political society to be rightfully termed 'democratic', it had to be founded on these principles.

Therefore, regarding the specifics of the government's approach to the military, Las Madres held that the defense of obedience--based on the assumption that those officers following orders were essentially ideologically indifferent--was spurious, as the potency of the National Security Doctrine was widespread. In other words, most of the military had been socialized into the National Security Doctrine, Las Madres asserted, and there was no reason to believe that junior officers had been exempt from this ideological training. This argument significantly expanded the number of military personnel who would be subject to prosecution, but, as Las Madres pointed out, the 'dirty war' was indeed the act of a unified corporate body, and that it would be morally specious to make legal distinctions according to a division of labour which resulted in the torture and murder of thousands of people (Osiel, 1986: 160-1).

These debates must also be seen as a struggle over the meaning and significance of history, and as such, it was not acceptable for the government to protect the military; for the Mothers, the hard historical fact was that the military *qua* institution was responsible. As we saw in Chapter 4, the struggle over the interpretation of reality and the meaning of event and images was as important as the actual events themselves. As Elizabeth Jelín explains, the Mothers' struggle was as much about memory and the interpretation of history as it was about the compiling of accounts of the military's practices. The movement's activities have always been sensitive to the "symbolic role in the construction of a historical memory, actively promoting the need not to forget and developing in different ways and in a variety of settings the symbols and events that would foster the preservation of the vivid memory

of the lived traumatic experience" (Jelín, 1994: 39). However, this is a historical memory imbued with a particular interpretation of the past; a reading of the dictatorship based on the military's assertion that their actions were necessary in order to preserve order and national values would legitimize the repression and perhaps allow such practices to be culturally acceptable in the future. Las Madres have always been committed to the slogan *nunca más*, and it is as if, for them, that remembrance, despite its profoundly painful implications, is the only guarantee of avoiding future state terror (Jelín, 1994: 39). Therefore, the conflict between Las Madres, on the one hand, and the military and state on the other, must be seen as a conflict between several "alternative ideological projects" (Jelín, 1994: 50). As we have seen,

there are those who want to glorify the behavior of the military as heroes of a war that had some inevitable "excesses", and there are those who seek to heal society's wounds and conflicts through forgetfulness and "reconciliation", concentrating their efforts on the (economic and political) urgencies of the present and "trying to look toward the future". Confronting these contradictory interpretations, the human rights movements actively and militantly devotes its efforts to activating memory, promoting recall, pointing out which events have to be retained and transmitted. The goal goes beyond setting up historical archives; it is a political and ideological task that stems from identifying remembrance with the construction of a political culture and identity (Jelín, 1994: 50).

It is important to keep these comments in mind while we examine the struggles that Las Madres waged against the state's strategies for dealing with human rights abuses, as it provides the context for the movement's general unwillingness to compromise.

Las Madres adhered to their call for *aparición con vida*, not because, in the face of the exhumations of mass unmarked graves, they naively believed the *desaparecidos* to be alive, as many politicians asserted condescendingly. Carmen de Guede explains their discursive position very clearly: "...the truth is, we know they've killed them. *Aparición con vida* means that although the majority of them are dead, no one has taken responsibility for their deaths, because no one has said who killed them, who gave the orders" (Fisher, 1989: 128). This position was in direct contradiction to the government's approach, which concentrated on exhumations and documentation of the repressive

apparatus and methods, but did not (or could not) indict those who were responsible, as this would entail a thorough purging of the military institution as a whole. But, as Graciela de Jeger points out, "the exhumations don't tell us anything we don't already know", and in fact was a politically motivated strategy to "eradicate the problem of the *desaparecidos*, because then there are no more *desaparecidos*, only dead people" (Fisher, 1989: 128-9). Another mother describes the exhumations as another form of *punto final*, another method for avoiding the determination of responsibility. Las Madres argue that for the personal assuagement of families' grief as well as the long-term protection of the newly inaugurated democratic system, it is responsibility that must be determined, not the fact of the murders and the return of remains (although this too is important). As well, exhumations and returning the bodies of children to mothers has demobilizing effects: in the words of one mother, "[i]t's very difficult for a mother who has received the remains of her child to go on fighting" (Beatriz de Rubenstein in Fisher, 1989: 129). "We don't want the names of the victims. We know who they are. We want the names of the murderers. We want them to tell us what happened. They have to explain what they don't want to explain. This is the meaning of *aparición con vida*" (Graciela de Jeger in Fisher 1989: 129).

As well, Las Madres were opposed to the presidential commission on the *desaparecidos*, a commission which had virtually no effective powers. Las Madres had long been calling for a bicameral legislative commission with full powers to subpoena and indict, with a voice for Las Madres and other human rights groups (Osiel, 1986: 159; Feijoó and Gogna, 1990: 89). Instead, the National Commission on Disappeared People (CONADEP) was created shortly after Alfonsín's assumption of the presidency in late 1983 and headed by important literary figure Ernesto Sábato. The objective of CONADEP, answerable to the President and not the Congress, was "to clarify the events relating to the disappearances and to investigate the fate of the *desaparecidos*" and not to determine "exact roles or legal responsibility of those implicated in the disappearances" (Osiel, 1986: 145).

As such it was an exercise in documentation only, necessary since the government claimed, despite the documentation efforts of the human rights organizations, that "there existed little solid evidence of sufficient availability and specificity to satisfy a court of law" (Osiel, 1986: 145). The evidence it compiled would be submitted to the courts, who would proceed with appropriate prosecution. CONADEP did document a total of 8 961 disappearances, and was able to identify 340 clandestine prisons, operating on public, private and military property, and named at least 1 300 members of the security apparatus who were involved in the torture and disappearances of these people (although these names were not part of the published report) (CONADEP, 1986: 449). However, because the Commission was based on voluntary testimony, and had no powers of subpoena, as the Mothers had insisted upon, the co-operation of the military with this process was impossible to obtain (Fisher, 1989: 130, Perelli, 1992: 431).

"We didn't accept [CONADEP] because we realized why they organized it," Hebe de Bonafini explains, "[t]hey set up CONADEP to avoid a bicameral investigation and the confrontation with the military this would have meant":

CONADEP served to waste a year. This Commission did nothing more than reproduce all the information the human rights organizations already had. It collected together all the evidence on the kidnappings and disappearances, put it into a file and presented it to Alfonsín. Alfonsín gave it to the Minister of the Interior who returned it to the army. So after a whole year which CONADEP wasted, it ended up with the military, so it ended up in the rubbish (Carmen de Guede in Fisher, 1989: 131).

As with the exhumations, the Commission--despite its emphasis in the report *Nunca Más* that the evidence compiled undeniably pointed to "a concerted plan of repression" (CONADEP, 1986: 10)--was interpreted as a political tactic to demobilize the Mothers' organization by effectively shifting the focus from the problem of the *desaparecidos*, systematic and organized, to a series of individual cases, individual bodies:

We had grown as an organization from looking for our own individual children to looking for all the children and the commission was a way of sending us back to the beginning again, to the individual struggle with everyone involved in their own individual case. We don't want our struggle to be reduced to a list of separate cases. Our struggle is not about

one child, but against a system which crushes all opposition (Porota in Fisher, 1993b: 118).

Moreover, the actual text of *Nunca Más* itself--filled with testimonies of horrifying torture and dehumanization--was emotionally overwhelming, both in its detail and in its inability to prescribe political or legal action. As Graciela de Jeger points out, "[t]he book was paralyzing because they describe all this horror and they don't give a way out. The assumption is that the *desaparecidos* are dead and the story is over" (Fisher, 1989: 131).

Even the judicial process initiated by the government against members of the military junta fell far short of Las Madres' conception of justice. Whereas Las Madres had called for the prosecution of all those implicated in the disappearances (Osiel, 1986: 159)--some 1,500 from CONADEP's findings--the government in the end limited trials to the leadership of the 3 juntas, ostensibly to avoid an all-out confrontation with the military, the possibility of which was certainly not remote ⁵ (Fisher, 1993b: 119). As well, the government repeatedly allowed the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces the opportunity to administer its own internal prosecutions, the vast majority of which ended in absolution and required a back and forth struggle between the military and civilian courts. ⁶ The logic guiding the government's approach to prosecution was that which guided its entire human rights policy, that the military had to be salvaged and preserved as an institution, but "it also had to be 'tamed' through the elimination from the organization of those rabid anti-democratic elements who actively supported the war against subversion and the methods employed during the dirty war" (Perelli, 1992: 430). The notion that the saving of the armed forces was possible was based on a crucial assumption on the part of the

⁵ Accounts of the armed forces' repeated threats and carrying out of rebellion are to be found in Cheresky, 1987; Corradi, 1987; Osiel, 1986; and Perelli, 1992.

⁶ The case of Lt. Alfredo Astiz, infiltrator of Las Madres who was instrumental in the disappearance of many of the most activist mothers (including their leader at the time, Azucena Villafior de Vicenti) and several foreigners, is particularly illustrative of this process. See Fisher, 1989: 148, n. 18.

government, that only one third of military personnel was actually anti-democratic, and thus it was strategically important to purge the anti-democratic third while supporting and encouraging the 1/3 assumed to be pro-democracy (Perelli, 1992: 431; Osiel, 1986: 149-50). As such, the doctrine of the 3 levels reflected Alfonsín's estimation of the strength of democratic and potentially democratic factions within the officer corps" (Osiel, 1986: 150).

Furthermore, the government's approach to the trials was also based on the doctrine of the 'three levels', which eventually became codified in law as '*Obediencia debida*'. This doctrine distinguished between levels of responsibility and this specified who could and could not be prosecuted for human rights abuses. Essentially, the claim of the government was that not all members of the armed forces shared equal responsibility for the repression, and that prosecution should be limited to those at the highest levels who planned the repression (the juntas) and those who engaged in 'excesses'. Therefore, those who had participated in human rights abuses, or were complicit, but could make a claim that they were following orders, were exempt from criminal prosecution (Perelli, 1992: 432; Osiel, 1986: 147). Las Madres fundamentally rejected *obediencia debida* as spurious, for no thinking person could be expected to be indifferent to orders which clearly involved illegal activities. As Elisa de Landin points out, junior officers were willing participants in these illegal acts. "When they were torturing me they were laughing among themselves. This wasn't the *obediencia debida* that they want to invent now. They might be able to make someone fight in a war, but not torture" (Fisher, 1989: 137). Moreover, Las Madres argued that the doctrine of the 3 levels fundamentally misunderstood who actually presented a future threat to civilian rule in Argentina. Given the prevalence of the National Security Doctrine throughout the officer corps, the trial of already retired generals left in place those who continued to hold anti-democratic sentiments. "They want to put on trial generals who are already out of the army, who no longer have power, and they're handing out amnesties to the most dangerous middle-ranking officers, the generals of tomorrow

who have grown up with the doctrine of National Security" (Elsa de Becerra in Fisher, 1989: 137). As such, not only was justice not being served, for Las Madres the government's goal of deterrence was also undermined.

Although Las Madres vehemently supported the civilian trial of the juntas, "we weren't happy with the way the trial was carried out. It didn't deal with the systematic kidnapping of young children and babies. They talked about 'errors' and 'excesses' when it was clear that the disappearances, torture and murder were part of a systematic plan, which involved written orders from the highest military officers" (Estela in Fisher, 1993b: 119). For Las Madres, the trials again focused on "discrete crimes against individual victims", and also masked the collective impact of repression on sociability and the nature of civil society as a totality. As Perelli explains,

the collective dimension of repression tended to be lost in the bleak recitation of individual pain and despair. There was no margin for the common people who had not been imprisoned, disappeared and tortured--and many times who felt guilt for their less-than-heroic behaviour--to realize that they had also been victims of the same system...The trial failed to provide an outlet for the feelings of personal inadequacy, anger and frustration repressed during the years of extreme individualization, under the culture of fear (Perelli, 1992: 435).

In sum, the Mothers became very cognizant of the fact that the government had not incorporated any of their demands into human rights policies. "We asked him for a bicameral commission and he [Alfonsín] gave us a national commission [CONADEP] which we did not elect. We said no to military justice and he gave us military justice. We said no to the dictatorship's judges and he confirmed 90% of them in their posts" (Feijoó and Gogna, 1990: 89).

Transition Politics and Las Madres: Division and Isolation

As is clear from the preceding section, although the fact that human rights and the trials of the juntas was on the post-dictatorship agenda at all is a testament to the moral and political influence of groups like Las Madres, the actual shape of the policies and practices

had little to do with Las Madres' demands and much more to do with diffusing a possible future military threat to the constitutional order. It is important, therefore, to assess both the reasons for this lack of political effectiveness at the level of the state as well as explore the impact of this failure in the organization itself.

In general, the discussions of movements emerging out of microspaces in the context of a transition from dictatorship to democracy, primarily in the work of María del Carmen Feijoó, Monica Gogna, and Jane Jaquette, have highlighted several strategically important issues. The first is dealing with the fact that the state under a democratically elected government operates in a manner quite distinct from that administered by a military regime. Perhaps most importantly, elected governments are not monolithic in the way that authoritarian regimes are or appear to be. This presents a strategic difficulty in that struggle is "no longer against a single opponent, maintaining a belligerent stance without any nuances whatsoever" (Feijoó and Gogna, 1990: 108). As such, Las Madres had to deal with the issue of moving from a "unified confrontation against a single opponent to the much more complex process of recognizing different opponents with alternative projects" (Feijoó, 1991: 84). The multiplication of political spaces and political actors meant that the range of choices for alliances and opponents was much larger, and "[t]o be effective in this new environment required more than principled commitment; it required political acumen and technical know-how" (Feijoó, 1991: 84).

However, as we saw earlier, the legacy of inaction and betrayal by the parties, trade union leaderships and courts meant that Las Madres were generally reluctant to work with them in the post-dictatorship era. The Mothers' experience of the political parties during and after the Proceso has led them to the view that such traditional, formalized institutions are deeply opportunistic, which does not fit with an interpretation of politics as deeply moral. For Las Madres, "politics means more to us than political parties. The parties ask for so little so that many will join them. We have always asked for everything, even

though few will join us" (Hebe de Bonafini in Fisher, 1993b: 135). In this way we can see the profound differences between a politics based on electoral success--marked primarily by compromise--and one founded in ethics or value which are difficult to negotiate away. Hebe de Bonafini's assessment of the trade union leadership is equally strong in its repudiation: "The CGT hasn't changed either. It's still led by the same bureaucracy who are all fascists" (Fisher, 1989: 145). The Mothers make a distinction between the leadership and the grassroots of the unions, and they concentrate their activism in this area on supporting the local struggles of workers and the workers' Human Rights Commission. Clearly, the deep distrust of leadership structures that Las Madres have developed during the course of their struggle remains, and profoundly affects the kinds of spaces in which they will work.

Las Madres' distrust extended beyond non-participation in political parties and cooperation with the CGT leadership. It also included a reluctance to utilize the courts as a way of bringing to justice the perpetrators of human rights abuses, particularly after the meagre sentences given to the juntas. As one Mother says, "[n]ow we don't initiate trials. From the time we realized that 90% of the judges are those who cooperated with the military government, we considered it useless...With these judges it's not worth doing anything. Only when things change we will do something in the court. Because of this we are calling for an independent judiciary" (Juanita de Pargament in Fisher, 1989: 141-2). In other words, the pressing political question for Las Madres as an organization was whether or not, in order to be effective, they could be "sufficiently flexible to adapt to the changing politics brought about by the new democratic rules of the game" (Feijoó, 1991: 83-4).

It seems clear from some of the statements of Las Madres during the transition that some leaders seemed to deny the fact that the political field was going to transform dramatically with the advent of democracy. Near the end of the junta, Hebe de Bonafini addressed the crowds at a rally in this way: "For us the struggle isn't going to change, it's

going to stay exactly the same. Instead of putting our demands to the military we are going to put these demands to the constitutional government" (Fisher, 1989: 125).

However, not everyone in the movement felt similarly to Bonafini and her supporters. The issue of participation in traditional political institutions was divisive from 1984, when "at a meeting in Santa Fe the Mothers were divided over what to do in the face of CONADEP. So it was resolved that each Mother had the freedom to give evidence to the President's Commission, but that the Madres de Plaza de Mayo as an entity weren't going to have anything to do with it" (Graciela de Jeger in Fisher, 1989: 131).

In part, the difficulty in making a transition to political struggle 'suited' for democracy stems from a relative unfamiliarity with democratic institutions. Importantly, according to Feijoó and Gogna, "[i]n Argentina as a result of recent history--two brief intervals of democratic government in the space of 20 years--these movements would appear to have devoted themselves more to dealing with dictatorial rather than democratic governments...The movements and their protagonists have not learned how to deal with a democratic scenario and have little historical memory of how to do so" (Feijoó and Gogna, 1990: 108).

As a result of these transformations, Las Madres did not have a unified approach to dealing with the new democratic context. It was over this issue of how to engage with institutions of the state and political actors that the most important divisions within the movement arose. Unity was easy under dictatorship: all the Mothers (as well as other human rights groups) were undeniably opposed to the atrocities of the *Proceso* and the military regime which carried them out. Although the Mothers were "[o]f differing backgrounds, ideas, experience and levels of commitment, movement participants found a minimum of common ground in opposing a common enemy" (Jelín, 1987: 29). However, in a context where concrete political/policy strategies to deal with human rights abuses were needed, divisions arose. "The difficulties women faced with the return of traditional

politics not only reflected the resistance of male-dominated organizations to change, but also the diversity of women's interests. Differences hidden by the common struggle against military rule now came to the surface" (Fisher, 1993a: 32).

There were also significant debates over the kinds of discursive strategies that Las Madres should be employing in the face of the constitutional government. Particularly contentious was the slogan of *aparición con vida*. Especially in the face of the exhumations, some Mothers began to drop the demand for *aparición con vida*, clearly Las Madres' most controversial and misunderstood demand (Fisher, 1989: 142): The conflict over the use of certain words and slogans to unify the movement clearly revolved around the idea that slogans and demands had to change in a changing political situation; *aparición con vida* was inappropriate for a democratic context because the subject to whom the demands were being made had changed (Jelín, 1994: 43, 46).

These differences also played out on the issue of how these autonomous organizations, formerly pitched in direct battle against the state, should now deal with this newly 'democratic' institution. Questions which dominated this debate included "should the women's movement be demanded from the government or should we be participants in the process? Should we risk governments and parties capturing and braking the momentum of the women's movement, or should we remain autonomous and risk powerlessness?" (Fisher, 1993a: 33). Increasingly, the internal divisions created as a result of conflicts over these questions made cooperation within Las Madres increasingly difficult, and this process culminated in the calling of elections for the first time and, subsequently, in the splitting of the group into two factions in January 1986 (Fisher, 1989: 142). A member of the splinter group ⁷ explains the rationale behind the split, which revolved around the recognition of some Mothers that the democratic terrain was

⁷ Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo--Línea Fundadora (Founding Line)

fundamentally different from that of the military regime. Rather than becoming more militant, these Mothers felt that a more pragmatic approach was necessary:

In the dictatorship we had a clear enemy and we had to fight it head on. When the democratic government came, the situation changed for the better. Democracy in Argentina is fragile and we had to be careful. We had to change our style. The enemy was no longer in Government House. The constitutional government isn't our enemy...As an organization we don't say *aparición con vida*, but nor do we accept their deaths without any explanation and the trial of those responsible (Renée Epelbaum in Fisher, 1993: 123).

The breakaway group of mothers felt that Las Madres' approach to dealing with the state was "too abrasive for an elected government" (Fisher, 1993a: 33). As well, the activities of Las Abuelas (or Grandmothers, a sub-group within the organization dedicated to the location and restoration of the children of *desaparecidos* taken or born in captivity and given to childless military or police couples) required a higher level of cooperation with the state, working in particular with the courts (Fisher, 1993a: 33). As Estela, an Abuela, points out,

[e]ven though this is no democracy, it's still a constitutional government, elected by popular vote. If it's true to say they don't comply with popular wishes, we still can't equate them with the dictatorship. If it hadn't been for the constitutional government, we wouldn't have found the children we've found...If this government gives us the chance to find a child then we'll use it. We will not close the doors on these opportunities (Fisher, 1993: 124).

Despite these arguments, a significant group of Mothers have not changed their discursive strategies. "The people of Argentina can't solve their problems in the courts," said their president. "We will never negotiate with the blood of our children" (Fisher, 1993a: 33).

The demobilizing impact of the democratic situation has been recognized by the Mothers--to no small extent, the advent of democracy, the CONADEP and the trials gave many the impression that these issues were actually being dealt with by the state, and that the time for mobilization and militancy had passed. Also, the fact that these government initiatives were not resulting in the actual exercise of justice was disillusioning for many, and in their sense of powerlessness they withdrew from political activity. Graciela de Jeger

sums up many of the post-dictatorship problems nicely:

The numbers at our marches have fallen. This is something which is happening throughout the country. Before the enemy was very clear. Everyone could see them. When Alfonsín came to power, the waters began to divide. One of the biggest factors in the demobilization was the illusion that something was being done. Some Mothers began to say that Alfonsín had good intentions, that you had to give him time. As we became more clear and combative people began to withdraw. Others left because they felt deceived and frustrated and there are people who have been badly affected psychologically (Fisher, 1989: 143).

Conclusions

The events during the transition to democracy in Argentina can be seen as a reassertion of the importance of the material in shaping politics. This is true in the sense that the state's overwhelming desire to reestablish the social harmony necessary for accumulation outweighed the need to dispense justice and provide a true accounting of the *Proceso*. Importantly, the fact that many of those who engineered, supported and benefited from the *Proceso*'s economic policies and repressive practices remained the ones able to determine Argentina's economic future, and their wrath was to be avoided at all costs. Moreover, the fact that the military retained the power to destabilize Argentine politically and subvert the process of attracting international capital also meant that the demands of Las Madres for a genuine castigation of the agents of the repression had to be put aside. One could easily come to the conclusion that, in the face of these circumstances, Las Madres were bound to be ineffective. This view is particularly consistent with neo-Marxist positions on the connections between capital and the state, something that post-Marxists do not adequately theorize.

Even in the sense that the transition was about the struggle over memory and the meaning of history, this discursive struggle was circumscribed by the interests of capital and state. Moreover, it is not clear that Las Madres won this discursive struggle either. While it may be that most Argentines now reject the legitimacy of the *Proceso*'s project and

the justification which accompanied it, it is not clear that they have adopted Las Madres' approach to remembering the repression in order to prevent its recurrence. It is apt to say, I think, that the majority of Argentines have adopted the view of the government: that dissent destabilizes a fragile democracy, and the best strategy is to move forward into the future and forget. In this sense, victory on the discursive terrain was at best temporary for the Mothers.

The most enduring aspect of the Mothers' struggle was the transformation that they wrought in themselves, which, as we have seen, is also profoundly political. Not only have they become political agents in their own minds, they have acquired a knowledge and a critique of Argentine political economy that perhaps surpasses theoretical accounts in its honesty and incisiveness. Moreover, they have transformed the meanings of their own lives, such that to be a mother, a woman and a citizen is radical and political. As well, their experience and knowledge, not to mention their commitment to social change and education of the young, forms an important seed for future struggle. Even while they have dropped out of the limelight nationally, they continue to organize for change. Perhaps this, in the context of widespread acquiescence to various forms of oppression, is a potent measure of effectiveness.

Some Conclusions and Exploratory Thoughts...

I have attempted to show many things in this thesis, perhaps so many things such that not all of the epistemological, theoretical and political issues raised here are adequately developed. However, I have pointed out quite emphatically the directions in which I believe political economy should proceed if indeed we in the field wish not only to understand the dynamics of actually existing resistance, but also desire to be a part of the construction of emancipatory projects. What this project is about, then, is identifying the gaps in understanding--laying the basis for future work--as much as it is about making claims about causality. The following is a summary of findings, but also is concerned with what has not been explained.

In terms of Las Madres themselves, their struggle did have profound impact on their own self-understandings. As I have shown in Chapters 4 and 5, whatever the public effect the Mothers may have had, they, through their own efforts, have permanently transformed the way they see themselves as mothers. Whereas most of the Mothers previously adhered to a traditional notion of motherhood as involving the private care and reproduction of their own families, their struggle led them to a radicalized and socialized vision in which "motherhood" entails the need to fight publicly and politically for the protection and flourishing of all future generations. The scope of their world has widened dramatically, to include not only the home but the political, economic and cultural relations in which that home is situated. This was in dramatic opposition to the junta's discourse on motherhood, which was private activity, and the family, which was a sphere of entirely private relationships. Of course this discourse was difficult to sustain in the face of the public or political intervening so dramatically on these "private" relationships, dictating which family relationships were legitimate and which were not. The fact of this contradiction--the family as private yet subject to the sanction and intervention of the state--became clear to the Mothers due to their own direct experience of it. For Las Madres, the defense of the

integrity of individual life became a defense of intimate and social relations and a rejection of all forms of "power-over".

During this struggle the Mothers also reinterpreted the meaning of being women in Argentine social and political life. The public nature of their activism rejected the notion that women could not be powerful political agents. This was a battle with themselves--having been socialized into these cultural assumptions--as well as with the people and institutions which surrounded them. Through the actual practice of collective activism, the Mothers discovered that they possessed the power to intervene in the world around them. It is this sense--of agency, of political efficacy--that is so difficult to generate in a world of multiple oppressions, and could only be more arduous in the culture of fear that was Argentina in the 1970s and 80s. Yet it is precisely this that Las Madres developed, and for that they must be recognized as deeply successful.

Finally, for a relatively brief moment, the Mothers were able to draw together hundreds of thousands of people in rejection of a brutal dictatorship. The humanist discourse they espoused and the non-violent politics which they practiced attracted a multiplicity of groups affected by the dictatorship, whose numbers were able to destabilize the junta to the extent that continued rule became untenable. As we have seen, the internal politics of the junta itself, the repudiation of those capitalist sectors which supported the military government, along with the increasing militancy of the rank-and-file working class had much to do with creating the conditions for the fall of the regime. However, it was Las Madres and the other human rights organizations which channelled the moral outrage felt by the population after 7 years of political and cultural repression and economic hardship. They articulated a set of values which united this anti-authoritarian movement--Life, Truth, Justice, Peace, Democracy--and although many of these terms continue to be contested, it may be the case that, without Las Madres, the manner in which Argentines rejected the junta may not have been as powerful as it was. This experience perhaps lends credence to

the continuing need for large-scale responses to large-scale systems of domination, and it seems that in the case of Argentina in 1983, a counter-hegemonic struggle which made connections between struggles was most powerful. Moreover, it seems that Las Madres were most publicly powerful when joined by other groups, when the links between human rights, workplace and economic democracy, democracy in the home, and anti-militarism were made. Of course, we must not forget that such a large-scale moment is the result of on-going local struggles built over time.

Despite these many important successes, it is important to remember that Las Madres did not achieve the society they envisioned. Their challenge to traditional modes of political interaction did not have a widespread impact. Their broad interpretation of democracy as encompassing all political, economic and social relations was not adopted by the political elites. Their struggle for justice for the disappeared and their families was thwarted at many junctures, as I discussed in Chapter 5. The pardoning of the convicted members of the junta by now president Carlos Menem in 1991 was perhaps the moment which revealed how much power the Mothers have lost, for even though an estimated 80% of Argentines opposed the amnesty, protests and activism of the kind seen in 1983 were not present.

I have argued that the Mothers were unable to prevent these results for the following reason: that the constraints of capitalism and the need to reestablish stable conditions for capital accumulation outweighed, for the state, the need to dispense justice on the level advocated by the Mothers. The power of the military to destabilize the political system remained too great, and it is relatively clear from the words of political leaders that they considered this a threat to the important business of reestablishing a prosperous capitalism. In this sense the prevailing interpretation of political elites during this period of democratic transition was that challenges to the government presented a challenge to the system itself, and were therefore deemed "undemocratic". The emphasis on "social

concertation" and national reconciliation throughout the continent is broader evidence for this kind of thinking. It would be an interesting and important project to explore in more depth the discourse of the political elites during the period of democratization in order to discern more fully the links they made between economics and human rights. This conclusion also emphasizes the continuing need to understand the relationship between capitalism and the state.

However, this appeal to the material is not the only explanation for Las Madres' dissipating power. It is also evident that it continues to be very difficult in Argentina to articulate a vision of politics, democracy, the military, and the state which radically departs from established cultural terms. One should not underestimate the power that political elites derive from the structures of liberal/representative democracy and their willingness to defend this.

I think there is another important reason why Las Madres did not have the impact that they desired on Argentine political life, which concerns the very nature of their struggle. Some have argued that part of the difficulty faced by the Mothers lay in their inability to adapt to the processes of democracy due to their "intransigence", unwillingness to compromise and inexperience. Whereas a rejection of the processes of formal political institutions certainly cuts one off from the outcomes that these structures can produce, it is clear to me that the results Las Madres were seeking could not be extracted from liberal democratic politics. If it is the case that Las Madres were challenging the very values on which Argentine economic, political and social life is based, and I think there is ample evidence within that supports such a view, one can see how difficult compromise can be. If the interpretations of what constituted an appropriate resolution of the human rights legacy of the *Proceso* were based on profoundly different ethical systems, then the case of Las Madres is not one of the failure to negotiate but one of the "incommensurability" of certain values. Las Madres were not engaging in "problem-solving", or the attempt to

have interests met within the confines of given social structures, but in the construction of a whole new system based on a different set of values. If we view the struggle in this way, then it is not surprising that Las Madres were unable to achieve this in 20 short years. This kind of struggle is what has been variously termed by Raymond Williams as the "long revolution", by Gramsci as a "war of position" and the construction of counterhegemony, and by Touraine as the struggle over "historicity". The struggle over fundamental values and meaning is never a short-term one, and as such we should view Las Madres as representing an element in a long-term radical project. Given their success in building an active, thinking and critical community of women with the knowledge and experience of political action, Las Madres are an important site for the generation of new struggles.

On a theoretical level, I have focused on the question of subjectivity and agency. The key theoretical questions I have asked in this paper are: What produces agency, or the capacity to intervene and transform the world around us? How can we understand the emergence and effectiveness of a multiplicity of agents? How can we come to grips with the way structures encourage and limit the possibilities for agency? I have argued that two of the paradigms prevalent in academic discourse--Marxism and post-Marxism--have something to tell about these queries. Specifically, Marxism foregrounds a particularly important experience of subalternity--class--and provides us with some of the tools needed to understand the structural implications of the capitalist mode of production and the attempts by dominant classes to construct hegemonic projects. These are undeniably crucial relationships to deal with, for the terrain of struggle is importantly framed by them. Moreover, Marxism provides us with the insight that if indeed we wish to fundamentally transform the social relations of production, we must pay keen attention to the role and activity of class politics, as we did in Chapter 3. It is in this area particularly--the area of structure--that post-Marxism is weak. Post-Marxist theorizing tends to emphasize instead the spaces for resistance to such an extent that one could believe that there are no structures

bearing down on people. Without an understanding of the field of political action--which emphatically includes the state and capital--we are made less able activists as we cannot anticipate responses or identify limits. We are made much poorer theorists if we cannot even attempt to explain these limits and responses.

On the other hand, there is something positive about post-Marxists encouraging us to look at agency. In particular, it is an important reminder that the indicator of resistance is not complete victory, but the way in which people--individually and collectively--understand, mediate, negotiate or reject the practices and meanings of hegemonic actors. While this is important, and Chapter 4 is focused on exploring these questions, it seems merely descriptive. The question still remains: why did these particular women react and develop these particular understandings? Why did these discursive strategies appeal to some women/Argentines and not others? It is not clear that this question can be answered at the current conjuncture or within the confines of this work; it does point to an important area for research that must be explored for both theoretical and political reasons.

There is, however, a problem with an almost exclusive theoretical focus on the exercise of domination that we can see in Marxism (I think here particularly of the attempts to understand the construction of global hegemony by neo-Gramscians). As I have argued above and in Chapters 3 and 5, it is crucial that we understand the nature of power and domination, its mechanisms, and material and discursive relations which keep power structures in place. However, why is it that we need this understanding if it is not to inform our political strategies of resistance? What is so often missing is a concrete analysis of the possibilities and locations of resistance. It often seems that struggle or 'the construction of a counterhegemony' is left to the last paragraph, as something for others to pursue. In addition to the important work on the nature of structures, what is desperately needed is a map of actually existing resistances, regardless of whether they are individual, partial, or 'unsuccessful' in that they have not yet overturned capitalism or sexism. In this

sense, the understanding that power is also diffuse is crucial; if we hold that power is completely centralized, then there is no possibility for change. Daily, there is power and resistance. We must squarely look at it, for it is upon these practices that challenges to capitalism, patriarchy, racism and (insert ism here) will be built.

Epistemologically speaking, I think it is clear that the totalizing gaze of academia is no longer tenable or useful. Although it is a very powerful thing to be able to name, describe, and frame that which transpires in the world around us, it is also a practice fraught with danger and the possibilities of silencing. To claim the status of 'legislator' or 'prescriber' of appropriate political practice rests upon an assumption--spurious, I have argued--that it is possible to possess total and true knowledge of the nature and meaning of the world.¹ If we take the position that knowledge is an historical, situated thing, variable both with context and the knowing subject, we cannot but take the subsequent view that knowledges are partial and are true with the appropriate temporal and spatial boundaries acknowledged. Moreover, if we reject both absolute objectivity and absolute relativism, we can come to see the true as something to be approximated, approached asymptotically, rather than as transparent and readily available. This position does not undermine our ability to make statements about the nature of the world, nor does it ultimately mean that we cannot adjudicate between claims; rather, it clearly states that our knowledge of the world comes from our particular experiences, which are no doubt valuable in both a theoretical and political sense, and that it is our experiences which in part shape or determine what knowledges are 'true' and useful to us at any particular moment. In other words, we *can* decide, from a position of situatedness which entails both powerfulness and marginality, which claims make the most sense theoretically, ethically and politically to us, but in turn we must give up the power to say for others which claims make the most sense for them.

¹ I would like to thank Fuyuki Kurasawa for the valuable insights that follow.

What is true for me is not true for everyone, and this understanding is both humbling and respectful of the actual lived experience of other people. This understanding puts limits on what I can say. This understanding prevents me from legislating, and makes my work subject to revision, critique and improvement, a process which must be rooted in debate, dialogue and actual political struggle.

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