

“Guatemalan and Argentine Women’s Response Towards State-Sanctioned Violence: The Role
of Motherhood Identity and Family Ideology in Daily Activism”

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Introduction

In the late 20th century, numerous Latin American countries suffered waves of political right-wing repression. As this occurred, various human rights movements and organizations emerged in response. Many of them were women-led. In response to state sanctioned violence, women across numerous Latin American countries have participated in human rights organizations with the goal of finding their loved ones, such as the Group of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared from Chile and Association for the Search of Disappeared Children from El Salvador. Along with a brief history of the selected countries political history, this study will focus on the endeavors of women-led human rights organizations in two countries: the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Argentina) and Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM, Guatemala). Women's actions include their personal and political beliefs as well as their behavior during protests or other organization-related activities. Before discussing these aspects of GAM and Mothers, we must consider the historical context that prompted their existence.

From 1976 to 1983, Argentina underwent an era of extreme repression designated the "dirty war" following the overthrow of President Isabel Perón. Economic turmoil and guerilla fighting during her presidency created the opportunity for a military junta to depose her on March 24, 1976 (Bouvard, 22; Mendez). Led by General Jorge Videla, the junta set out to rid Argentina of subversives and utilized forced disappearances to do so (Fabj; Kriger). Most of the disappeared were 20-30 years old, blue collar workers, students, and certain white collar workers. After being taken they were subjected to torture.

Upon the disappearances, loved ones, such as their mothers began to search for them. Shortly after, the searching women would band together to create the Mothers of the Plaza de

Mayo. The main leaders of the group were Hebe de Bonafini, Nora Cortiñas and Azucena Villaflor. Later on, new groups such as the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo would branch from the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Through the use of marches and public demonstrations, these mothers began the fight towards truth and justice.

Guatemala experienced a long era of political repression, from 1960 to 1986, in what has been called the Guatemalan civil war. The civil war began after the forced removal of President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 after he passed land reform that benefited poor farmers. After his removal, various generals within the military led Guatemala in a fight against leftist guerillas. During the civil war, indigenous communities were especially targeted, prompting it to be labeled a genocide. Men were specifically singled out, often leaving behind women to protect and provide for the family. Following mass disappearances, women began the search for their loved ones and eventually Mutual Support Group was established in 1984. The main leaders were Nineth de Garcia, Rosario Godoy de Cuevas, and Isabel Chóxom de Castañon. Through protests, demonstrations and public calls to action, they worked together to find their loved ones and bring justice to perpetrators of violence.

It is critical to study the histories and impacts of women-led human rights organizations. As will be explored later, while scholars have discussed the histories of GAM and Mothers/Abuelas¹ individually, they have not been examined comparatively. Despite both of these movements being women-led and working towards similar goals, there were many differences between them that speak to the context of their respective country, suggesting that these factors greatly influenced the attainment of their goals. Understanding this brings forward

¹ For purposes of this paper, GAM will be used to indicate Mutual Support Group and Mothers/Abuelas will be used to indicate the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo unless otherwise stated.

the question of these key factors that differentiate Mothers and GAM. I argue that each parties treatment by their corresponding state affected the organization's ability to continue their activism via either maternal or familial ideals; this also evolved as each movement progressed.

Literature Review

The existing research explored the history of Mothers/Abuelas and GAM including initial meetings with members of their corresponding state and projects taken on by its members (Fabj, Goddard, Shirmer, Peluffo, Berger, Bouvard). There was discussion about each movement's individual strategic choices, including the use of manifestations and the symbols that emerged as a result. Some examples of this include the frequency of protests and the use of photographs and silhouettes (Longoni, Simon, Tandeciarz, Lopez-Cabrales, Souto, Suero, Kriger). Furthermore, the literature considered the differences and conflicts that surfaced within the progression of the movements and how that affected its trajectory, such as class and ideological differences (Pauchulo, Peluffo, Afflitto). Another critical aspect that was considered was truth and justice, especially how this changed for individuals between differing movements and also within the same groups (Benitez-Jimenez, Sikkink, Mendez). Lastly, a majority of the readings focused on recurring themes seen within each of the movements such as motherhood and familism (Fabj, Afflitto, Berger).

A foundational issue underlying the general scholarship regarded the overall surge of Guatemalan and Argentinian women's involvement in politics from a theoretical standpoint. Goddard argued that protest served as a way to define boundaries between the state and the rest of society, referencing the Mother's activism. Goddard referenced political action as unpredictable and innovative. Rapone complemented Goddard's argument, stating that violence

disrupted unity efforts within affected Guatemalan communities and terrorized them into political passivity. Bouvard affirmed the unpredictability factor, reiterating that the Mothers held woman-dominated jobs previously and were not expected to be initiators of political action. Despite the use of violence in Guatemalan communities, resistance movements emerged because of the need to change corrupt institutions (Rapone, Afflitto, Lopez Cabrales).

One reason that motivated Argentine and Guatemalan women to organize was their common identity as women. For Guatemalan women, Rapone argued that these groups provided them with emotional support and treated their gender identity as a strength (Rapone, 120). Bellucci expressed similar sentiments, detailing that the Mothers were a group of “unknown women who demanded to see their children alive” (Bellucci, 84). Scholars stated that there was a shift in gender roles that occurred because of their organizing. Berger supported this argument by stating that Guatemalan women did not necessarily join these groups looking to reform gendered issues but transformed them as movements progressed (Berger, 12).

Scholars discussed common protesting tactics used by Mothers/Abuelas and GAM. One of these was the use of photographs by the Mothers (Longoni, 5). In their protests, they took family or identification photographs and made them into posters. Longoni argued that the use of photographs transferred the disappeared from an intimate space into the grand public arena. Tandeciarz echoed this, stating that the use of photographs provided the Mothers a new space to confront the losses as they cannot grieve properly. On the other hand, Simon interpreted the use of photographs by GAM differently as they were utilized to promote awareness of the violence. Furthermore, Longoni discussed posting silhouettes around the city to represent the disappeared.

Weekly marches at the Plaza de Mayo were integral to the Mother's strategy. Tandeciarz characterized these weekly protests as a way of public mourning that simultaneously interrupted city life and created awareness for passersby. Marches, critical to GAM, did not occur as frequently as the Mother's but served similar roles of raising awareness of the disappeared (Simon, 12). Lastly, another strategy unique to the Abuelas was the "*indice de Abuelidad*" where DNA was used to prove a link between a missing grandchild and the grandmother (Souto, 331).

Although many scholars discussed the unity and solidarity within each organization, few scholars have focused on the conflicts and tensions inside the movements. Peluffo explained that reparations, exhumations, and class differences brought divisions within the Mothers. Many Mothers argued about accepting or denying reparations, as accepting exonerated the junta from delivering the truth about the disappeared. Other Mothers stated that monetary compensation was necessary (Peluffo, 91). On the issue of exhumations, some stated that allowing for exhumations meant accepting their children's death; on the other hand, some Mothers wanted to be able to lay their child to rest (Peluffo, 91). Class differences permeated the aforementioned debates and eventually led to the creation of three separate branches: Mothers Association, Founders Line and Abuelas (Peluffo, Pauchulo). The last two organizations were more ideologically similar than the Mothers Association. Divisions also occurred within GAM (Afflitto, 133). Since GAM was primarily led by non-indigenous women, that led to conflict with the Mayan leadership that left in 1989 to create CONAVIGUA (National Coordination of Widows of Guatemala). Additionally, after being accused of corruption in 1992, more members left to create FAMDEGUA (Association of Relatives of the Detained/Disappeared of Guatemala).

Furthermore, another topic discussed was the idea of truth and justice. GAM and Mothers/Abuelas wanted justice for their disappeared loved ones, which included trials for those responsible. However, as explored by Sikkink, there was not much agreement on the best path towards doing this. Common arguments state that prosecution trials should start after the transition to democracy however many argue that trials should wait because it could trigger another coup. Benitez-Jimenez explored this idea as well, within the context of Guatemala and the legislation that occurred after the end of the civil war that hindered/favored justice operations. Moreover, Mendez discusses the legislation that impacted prosecution trials in Argentina such as Due Obedience and Punto Final.

Another major theme was what motivated women individually to participate in the political arena, relating to gender roles. More specifically, scholars describe how ideals of motherhood and *marianismo* do or do not intersect with Argentinian and Guatemalan women's desires to participate politically. To begin, Fabj examined the idea of marianismo within the context of the Mothers. Marianismo referred to the idealization of Latin American women as being "semi divine [and] morally superior" (Fabj, 4). The main aspect of marianismo was that women were expected to sacrifice, be submissive and strong. Since marianismo expected mothers to put their families first, they had to search for their children despite the danger (Fabj, 6).

However for Central American women, marianismo and ideals of motherhood were not the sole reasons for political mobilization. Lopez Cabrales explained that poverty was a crucial factor for organizing (Lopez Cabrales, 186). Furthermore, Lopez Cabrales added that many Central American women were widowed by the murders of their husbands, which motivated

them to organize since they were left to care and provide for their family (184). Afflitto echoed these same sentiments, adding that not knowing where their disappeared loved ones were motivated women to join human rights organizations, similar to Argentinian mothers (Afflitto, 54). Moreover, Afflitto analyzed the role of motherhood and its impact on Guatemalan women stating that they had the ability to organize because family was at the center of the issue (Afflitto, 62). Afflitto argued that war forced women to take on a more active role in politics, since it affected their ability to participate in traditional gender roles, in contrast to Fabj who argued that ideals of marianismo compelled Argentinian mothers to search for their children. Rapone added to Afflitto's argument by stating that women have been oppressed by the army in Guatemala for a long time (Rapone, 119).

So, scholars have produced extensive individual, studies of Mothers and GAM along with discussion of maternal identification within the groups, especially the Mothers. While these are critical topics to study, this has led to the neglect of other equally important conversations. One of these was the basic nature of GAM and Mother's analytical comparison in already existing scholarship. Only discussing the organizations historical timelines often left out exploring their ideological or strategic differences, for instance. Moreover, the interactions between the state and the corresponding organization are rarely at the forefront but this was vital to understand as it provided context for their particular historical timeline. These key subject matters are ones that are explored both within GAM and Mothers individually but also between the organizations.

Findings/Analysis

While Mothers/Abuelas and GAM were both groups of women searching for disappeared family members, critical factors distinguished them and affected the advocacy work they were

able to accomplish. For example, while neither group received a clear response from their respective governments regarding the status of their disappeared loved ones there were key differences in how each organization was perceived and treated by the state. In the case of the Mothers, when their movement first emerged in early 1977 they were simply ignored by the dictatorship. Since at first they did not explicitly accuse the junta of disappearing their children the junta felt no need to respond to them (Fabj, 9). Hoping to end the Mothers marching, junta member General Harguindeguy met with them three months after they began organizing and insinuated that the disappeared may simply have run away with someone. Maria del Rosario, one of the Mothers at that meeting, ridiculed his notion: “We told him that they were cowards, because even a cruel dictator like Franco has signed the death sentences with his own hand, that making people disappear was cowardly...We told him we would come back every week until he gave us an answer and that we would walk in the square every week until we dropped” (Fabj, 9). Along with the anger in del Rosario’s response, she also expressed the immense pain and suffering the Mothers had experienced. With their children “disappeared” it left them in a difficult state as they never really knew what happened to them. By belittling the junta, the Mother’s emphasized how badly they wanted to know the whereabouts of their children. Moreover, this interaction signified a turning point in the relationship of the Mothers and the junta. After being directly insulted by the Mothers, the junta could no longer ignore their activism. Thus, at this point the junta began to paint the Mothers as “crazy women.” By dismissing them as such the junta no longer felt it necessary to properly address their claims.

Despite being depicted as “crazy”, the Mothers seemed to embrace this label and gathered strength from it. One Mother expressed this when she said, “Of course [the junta] called

us mad. How could the armed forces admit they were worried by a group of middle-aged women? And anyway, we were mad. And when everyone was terrorized we didn't stay at home crying,--we went to the streets to confront them directly" (Fabj, 9). Being disregarded as "crazy" was undoubtedly the junta's way of avoiding their questions yet the Mothers acknowledged and embraced their new label, plainly stating "anyway, we were mad" (Fabj, 9). However, this designation as "crazy" was not mentioned in later interviews with Hebe de Bonafini or Juanita Pargament. This suggested that the label may have lost meaning as their claims about the disappeared were validated. Even so, it did help create a sense of relative immunity for them as the Mothers justified illegally protesting as simply being "mad." This created a relationship where the junta would not interfere in their protests and the Mothers would continue to organize, creating a type of limited immunity.

Their limited immunity also originated from traditional associations of motherhood. Some of them "were permitted to stay for hours sitting in a waiting room, waiting for a hypothetical response to their request for information. Or they were treated with a certain kind of charity by some people who belong to the lower levels of the military establishment" (Femenia 6). Other individuals may not have been permitted the same flexibility as these mothers were. This quote suggested that the junta did recognize them as mothers and understood the duties that accompanied that, such as searching for children despite the potential harm. Their maternal roles were visible and in a way, respected. By the junta providing them with that bit of tolerance explained why the Mother's movement was flexible.

And yet, the relative protections offered by the junta's initial dismissal of the Mothers had limits, as seen with the case of Azucena Villaflor, one of its leaders. On December 10, 1977

Villaflor was taken by the junta and eight days later placed onto a death flight (Abuelas de Plaza, 22). Her disappearance was shocking to the remaining Mothers as many believed that the junta would never arrest middle-aged woman, much less physically hurt them (Bouvard, 78). This emphasized that violence was not frequently used against them. Moreover, since Villaflor was not confirmed dead until years later, the Mothers were left with some sense of hope for her safe return. While exhumations later revealed her cause of death, the gruesomeness of her death was not immediately known to others.

Azucena's disappearance reminded the Mothers of their fragile relationship with the junta, as many women became scared to associate themselves with the Mothers. However Hebe de Bonafini challenged this fear when she stated "[the junta] said we decapitate the movement, and the movement is over. And they thought [we weren't] going to be strong, that [we weren't] going to keep growing" (Bouvard, 78; Sierra, Entrevista a Hebe, 3). Bonafini asserted that although they had suffered a tremendous loss, their movement was strong enough to survive and move forward, stating that their group continued to grow because "[we] insisted...we were scattered throughout the country, the whole world already knew us" (Sierra, Entrevista a Hebe, 3). Bonafini acknowledged their efforts, as well as their growing presence, as reasons why the group flourished, in the face of a violent dictatorship.

One element continuously used by the Mothers was an intense focus on maternal identity. This was evident when the leaders were questioned about the participation of women. Hebe de Bonafini affirmed that women were the leaders of Mothers because "it was created that way, because mothers, women are strong, because women give their lives to the child when they are born and give it to them every time, because [women/mothers are] more consistent, stronger,

more persevering and for a child one is never afraid to what [one] does” (Sierra, Entrevista a Hebe, 2) Bonafini associated having strength and perseverance to women but specifically highlighted the maternal identity by stating that mothers continuously give life to their child, emphasizing why mothers were essential to the movement. Moreover, it stands in contrast to the role of the fathers of disappeared children.

Since fathers did not have an integral role in this activism the women further concentrated on their maternal identity and strengths. For example, Bonafini mentioned how her husband “always was scared...[he was] scared every time I did not arrive [from the Plaza de Mayo]” (Sierra, Entrevista a Hebe, 2). Juanita Pargament, treasurer of the Mothers, experienced similar reactions from her husband who would tell her, “don't go, [from] there you don't come back” (Sierra, Juanita, 4). If the father’s fears inhibited their organizing, it further motivated the Mothers to keep doing it themselves. For example when Bonafini’s husband asked if she wasn’t tired of protesting despite not seeing results she responded: “No, I am not tired. Every time I want to leave earlier [to the protests]” (Sierra, Entrevista a Hebe, 4). Clearly, Bonafini’s love for her child outweighed any physical and emotional exhaustion she may have experienced. Her desire to go earlier to the marches reinforced her dedication to the movement and cemented the maternal motivation of her activism. Despite her husband’s claim that little was being accomplished, Bonafini’s dedication proved that she continued in her activism, which stemmed from her love for her child along with her maternal identification.

Ironically, some Mothers explained how centering parts of their maternal identity such as sacrificing everything for their children often meant putting off other traditional motherhood responsibilities. Pargament described how “women left the sewing, washing, cooking, and taking

care of their home...They were women who did not activate in political matters” (Sierra, Juanita, 4). This quote illustrated how the women who decided to organize left behind “traditional roles”, essentially entering the public sphere which forced the women to take on different motherhood roles. Similar to Bonafini’s case, even if the husbands attempted to limit them due to fear, Pargament stated that their determination to find their children motivated them to continue their work. Cortiñas reflected on these new roles they faced when she expressed, “It is sad that our separation from domestic and private life and our leap into public life happened because our children were disappeared. But now there is no turning back” (Bellucci, 87).

Furthermore, the centering of motherhood was evident in the symbols adopted by the Mothers such as the white head scarves and photographs (Longoni, 5). Nora Cortiñas discussed the first appearance of the white kerchiefs. At first, she stated that they were a “baby nappy: [they] all had one at home that belonged to a grandchild” (Bellucci, 86). This quote implied that it was common sense for them to use the diaper as it was commonplace among the women of the group, once again emphasizing how important maternal identity had become to the organization.

Additionally, the use of photographs supported the intense focus on motherhood, especially during protests when many Mothers would wear photographs of disappeared children. Photographs were incredibly important to the Mothers because it attempted to showcase the complex identity of the disappeared. The absent loved one continued to be central to the Mothers’ lives and using photographs where the missing interacted with family created a snapshot for the public to see why the Mothers fought so much for them (Longoni, 7). It was an attempt for the public to see how the Mothers viewed the disappeared, not as “subversives” but as people who were loved. While it may seem that the Mothers were attempting to invoke a

broader family ideology, it was more of an attempt to prove to the junta and the public that the person in the photograph existed and why the Mothers cared for them so much. As explained by Femenia, through the use of photographs “they are testifying that their sons and daughters were real people, with real names, jobs and lives. They are thus presented to the popular consciousness as “living beings with a right to continue living their lives” (Femenia, 11). Presenting the disappeared through family photographs added a humanizing element to their protests as opposed to using identification photographs on placards, which were often used due to not having other available photos (Longoni, 7).

From the other side, the state focused on the women’s maternal identity in an attempt to hurt and discredit them. After the death of Azucena Villaflor, the junta “[blamed] the disappearances of the people connected with the Mothers on nihilistic subversion” (Bouvard, 78). While the junta did not outright declare the Mothers as subversives, they were implicated as “mothers of the subversives.” In response, the Mothers held a press conference where they publicly accused the junta of disappearing their children. Following that event, the junta launched a campaign in late 1977 that ridiculed the Mothers as “Las Locas” in an effort to discourage the public from associating with them (Bouvard, 79). In that example, the junta focused on their flawed maternal identity, building upon existing characterizations of “crazy mothers.” While in early 1977, the junta viewed them as “crazy” the campaign served to have the general public believe that as well. Several Mothers noticed that friends and family began to distance themselves or would not want to talk to them in public, often receiving “hasty and distant greetings” (Bouvard, 79). Similarly, when they began to search for their children, the junta blamed their disappearance on the specific failings of the mother’s, claiming that “You, as

a mother should know where your son is. Why didn't you bring him up better?" (Femenia, 3). Questioning their parenting attacked maternal roles that the Mothers were proud of and enjoyed fulfilling; this was meant to manipulate and guilt them into believing they were at fault for their child's disappearance. The junta hoped that this campaign would exonerate them of any guilt. Moreover, the junta furthered this by launching media campaigns that asked parents, "Do you know how, where your son/daughter is, and what he/she is doing and with whom?" (Femenia, 3). Once again, this was meant to shame mothers and other family members into believing that their loved ones disappearance was their fault. Ultimately, though the junta's attempt to silence them through guilt was unsuccessful and the movement grew despite their efforts.

GAM's relationship with the Guatemalan government was quite distinct from that of the Mothers to the Argentinian military junta. A major difference was visible in GAM's initial proceedings with the Guatemalan state. While the Mothers directly questioned and later implicated the junta in disappearing their children GAM at first attempted to work with the government and did not initially accuse them publicly of taking part in the disappearances. Privately though, they believed the government was involved and later on GAM did accuse the government of having a role in it (Simon, 12). But despite having initial "friendly" meetings with General Mejia, who was in power at the time, the organization was under constant threats, both to members and leaders such as Nineth de Garcia and Rosario Godoy de Cuevas. One woman recalled how the army threatened community members who were involved in GAM stating, "If anyone here is leaving from here to complain to Mutual Support, we're going to leave them strung up on a pole on the mountain where we find them" (Recovery of Historical, 5). This quote illustrated how, from the start, the state was ready and willing to use direct violence in order to

silence potential GAM members. The graphic description of the violence emphasized their highly aggressive orientation.

Along with these general warnings, the government explicitly threatened the leaders of GAM as recounted by Nineth de Garcia. She stated that in March of 1985 the departmental governor for Guatemala City called her and three other GAM members to sign a certificate “that threatened us, which said that with regard to the public disorder we were provoking, they considered that this was a subversive act and therefore, we should abstain from any other action. And if we didn’t abstain from carrying out this type of illegal action, the weight of all this would fall on our shoulders. ‘Especially on the three of you,’ he said. And he was referring to Rosario [Godoy de Cuevas], Isabel [de Castañon] and me” (Simon, 39). This quote revealed the Guatemalan state’s explicit idea of GAM as an antagonistic organization causing “public disorder.” Also, the members were seen as subversives, since the work of GAM was labelled a “subversive act” that engaged in “illegal action.” While this was an example of the government directly threatening them, there were several examples of the government threatening them in other ways. Isabel de Castañon remembered that on March 21, 1985, “a man with a gringo accent called and told me not to go out to the demonstration next Friday...don’t sleep at home because tomorrow something bad will happen. The same day, someone called Nineth de Garcia some 20 times and just breathed” (Simon, 38). The frequent ominous threats by the Guatemalan government highlighted their overall goal of suppressing GAM. Yet, the most frightening aspect was the ease in which the state employed multiple different strategies, ranging from explicit threats to ingraining fear into the leaders.

Furthermore, GAM's continued activism aggravated the state as seen in GAM's interactions with them. This was most visible in the meetings GAM had with General Mejia. A GAM member recalls that "The first time, he acted very humanely, very pained; you'd think he was even about to start crying. But when the press was absent, he took a cynical attitude, impudent; his face changed completely. And the last time, when the journalists weren't present anymore, he said, 'it seems as though you are accusing me and we don't have them.' 'you have them,' we said. 'We don't have them,' he replied" (Simon, 25). During the progression of these meetings, as the quotes imply, General Mejia began to be indifferent and apathetic about the disappeared. It can be inferred that the presence of the press was the reason for General Mejia's "sympathy", as GAM members noted that once gone, his attitude became "cynical." It was clear that the state did not like GAM bringing to light the issue of the disappeared, since once the media was not present General Mejia told GAM that he felt "accused" and assured GAM that the state does not have them. In all, the numerous interactions between GAM and General Mejia highlighted the quick deterioration of their relationship, which would lead to increasing amounts of threats, harrassment, intimidation and murder of GAM leaders.

In the treatment of GAM members by the state, it became clear that ideas of motherhood would not have the same strategic role they did for the Mothers. The Guatemalan state did not appear to value maternity in the same way that the Argentinian junta did. As a result the Guatemalan state responded early on to GAM's organizing with extreme violence towards them. The state explicitly viewed the activism of GAM as "subversive" putting it in the same category as rebel guerillas and other enemies of the state, and subject to aggressive forms of violent retaliation. This included the bombing of their office, a clear attempt to eliminate them as they

would to rebel guerillas (“20 Años de Lucha”). GAM was aware of their standing, acknowledging that they lacked the “protectiveness of motherhood” (Schirmer, 22). Of course, many GAM members were also mothers, yet that identity meant little to the state as they continued their explicit threats of gruesome violence and other fear tactics against them. Through the state’s actions against GAM, their decision to deter solely focusing on maternal ideals becomes clear.

An example of GAM’s inability to center maternal identity and avoid the image of the “rebellious” organization was the assassination of Rosario Godoy de Cuevas on April 4, 1985. Godoy’s death came a few days after another GAM leaders death and during a time of increased threats (Simon, 44). The day of her murder, Godoy, her 21 year old brother and her two year old son Augusto went shopping and never returned. The bodies were found in a car at the bottom of a ravine and witnesses stated that Godoy’s body appeared to have “bite marks on her breasts, her pants were covered with dirt as if she had been dragged on the ground, and that her underpants were covered with blood” (Simon, 45). Also, her son was found with no fingernails. Unfortunately, Godoy’s maternal identity could not protect her as the label of “subversive” overpowered her role as a mother. The presence of Godoy’s son did not influence the army’s decision to abuse her which emphasized that the state was capable of egregious acts to eliminate “rebellious groups.” Godoy’s assassination served as another example of the extreme lengths the Guatemalan state went to in order to eliminate “subversives.”

While Godoy’s murder was similar to Azucena Villaflor’s case, as they were both leaders within their organizations, one major difference set them apart. In the case of the Mothers, the junta rarely used physical violence against them, opting instead to utilize various

rhetorical campaigns to attack and alienate them through public opinion. However for GAM, physical violence was regularly implied, and often employed. The frequent and graphic nature of the violence done against GAM set it apart from the experience of Mother's. For a long time Azucena Villaflor was in a limbo status of "disappeared" as the gruesome details of her death were not known until years later. But in Guatemala, the government did not hide their acts of violence, both through threats and then murder. For example, Godoy's family's bodies were left in a ditch known to be a dumping ground for the army (Simon, 45; Sin Miedo). The cause and effect between Godoy's activism and the state's retaliation was clear for all to see.

However, the violence utilized by the Guatemalan government was not limited to physical, and included emotional and psychological tactics as well. Many women stated that the army forced them to perform tasks such as cooking and dancing under the threat of death (Recovery of Historical, 74). The humiliation and fear this practice brought was a distinct case of emotional violence, especially since their lives in that moment depended on being good entertainers or cooks. This type of cruelty was just as damaging even if physical violence was not employed.

Additionally, Nineth de Garcia's experience with the army constituted an invasion of privacy, a type of non-physical violence. She recalled that "[the army] remained in the house for about an hour. That which I can never forget is that they had the brutal cynicism to enter the kitchen. They heated up some coffee and they proceeded to drink it with great tranquility, while they spoke of what they had done to Fernando" (Reed, 100). The army's actions were clearly brutal as they forcefully entered de Garcia's home and openly discussed what they did to her husband. Similar to the previous case, even though she was not physically hurt, only one can

imagine the emotional distress of hearing the gruesome details of her husband's disappearance. The fact that various types of violence were often used against GAM can partially be explained by the fact that Guatemala was in a civil war. Just as rebel guerillas had to be eliminated by any means the state was not going to engage in discourse with GAM, especially after GAM implicated them in the disappearances.

Even if maternity was not a central theme in GAM's organizing, it was a personal motivation for the women activists. Nineth de Garcia reflected on the impact of motherhood by stating that while GAM had changed her and made her stronger, she was still "a mother that profoundly loves her daughter. This child is what keeps me living...This is the love most pure that never fails me. This is my hope and my inspiration, along with my organization GAM" (Reed, 103). Nineth's daughter provided her with the strength necessary to continue rallying with GAM despite the danger involved. Also, her statement implied that her daughters presence grounded her, especially when she expressed that her daughters love "never fails me." By saying this, she suggested that even if other aspects of her life disappoint her, such as the state and the status of the disappeared, her daughter was not capable of doing this.

Along the same lines, one Guatemalan woman illustrated how her maternal consciousness motivated her to protect her children against extreme threats of state violence. In this case, the woman and her two children were jailed for denouncing a police officer in connection to her husband's disappearance. When the officer pulled out a gun to kill her she asked him to "kill my two children and then kill me so at least I'll have some peace of mind," (Simon 8). Despite being in a life or death situation, her first impulse was to think of her children's wellbeing. Although that meant potentially seeing her own children die, she preferred

that conclusion over having them see her die first. In the end, the officer spared both her and her children, illustrating how her maternal instincts saved their lives. In addition, Guatemalan women generalized and broadened their maternal roles in response to state aggression. They continued to care for and protect their children against the severity of civil war, feeling their maternal responsibilities even more urgently. For instance, when the army would attack entire communities, women would take care of all the village children, even if the child was not theirs (Recovery of Historical, 82). These cases illustrated that maternal identity mattered to these women even if it did not factor explicitly within GAM's activism, ideology and strategy.

Acknowledging that motherhood was not as effective in protecting GAM members and Guatemalan women in general, GAM members did not foreground it within their activism. Instead, they opted to use a broader family ideology in their protest rhetoric. One prominent example was a GAM newspaper ad that included various photographs of babies with the caption, "Dad, where are you? Why do I no longer have your protective hand that gives me love, warmth and safety?" (Simon, 14). The photographs of the babies created an emotional tie to viewers, who must ponder that these children no longer have their fathers with them and now belong to broken families. The fact that the poster highlighted the absence of love, warmth and safety reiterated the important role of a father and emphasized that these children were now deprived of this. Additionally, for many GAM members and Guatemalan women in general, their motherhood role was not the only impacted category of personal relations. The aggressive scale of the civil war meant that they not only lost children, but husbands, siblings and parents. Many women became the sole provider for their families and took on larger roles within their communities (Recovery of Historical, 81). For example, one Guatemalan woman, Adriana

Portillo-Bartow, testified that her disappeared family members included her two children, dad, stepmother, newborn sister, and sister in law. Moreover, she stated that due to the intimidation on behalf of the state, it was best for her remaining family to leave to the United States (Familia Carillo Portillo, 11). In this example, Adriana's maternal identity was only one aspect of the overall loss she suffered. She lost her children, most of her family and then also uprooted her life from Guatemala to live in the U.S. Adriana's case illuminated the importance of using a familial ideology and why solely focusing on motherhood would not accurately portray the experiences of many Guatemalans.

The broader range of violence and personal loss motivated GAM to utilize a broader familial rhetoric. This was evident in an interview with Nineth de Garcia where she discussed her incentive to continue working for GAM. She stated that "[her daughter] looks a little bit like Fernando. She has his eyes" (Reed, 103). Although this may not outwardly seem as an attempt by Nineth to bring in family ideals, it subtly hinted at her now broken family. Since her daughter looked like her husband, every time she looked at her daughter Nineth was reminded of the fact that he was disappeared and may never return. Another example of the use of motherhood and family values by GAM was seen in a series of letters written by a member of GAM. In this case, a mother, Blanca Rosa Quiroa de Hernandez, lost her son Oscar David Hernandez, who left his wife and son behind. In one of her letters, she lamented the fact that it had been five years since Oscar disappeared and that she continued to grieve for him stating, "Today marks 5 years of your illegal capture and subsequent disappearance...I want to tell you, wherever you are, that every day and night your beloved image comes to me and touches the deepest fibers of my being...I hear your clear and diaphanous voice that asks me to fight to the end for your life and freedom"

(Hernandez Quiroga, 95). In this quote, it was clear that her son's disappearance continued to hurt her, even though five years had passed. However, at the end of her quote, she made it evident that she planned to fight for the life of her son. Additionally, Blanca did not repeatedly emphasize the fact that she lost her son, but only a few times. Instead, she chose to focus on the fact that her grandson lost his father and that he asked, "where is my dad, when will he come?" (Hernandez Quiroga, 95). This phrase can be traced back to the poster created by GAM that expressed similar sentiments. Moreover, the similarity in phrases stressed the fact that Guatemalan men were specifically targeted thus leaving women to take care of the remaining family. In this same letter, the mother ended by proclaiming that she will continue to look for him, in tribute to him and his son by stating, "My son: I swear that in the name of Oscarito, the most sacred memory you left me, that I will not rest until I find you!" (Hernandez Quiroga, 95). It is worth noting that the mother chose to focus on the fact that her grandson's family was now broken. This illustrated that motherhood was rarely centered by GAM members but instead was a component of their strategy. Overall, this letter illustrated the familial ideals emphasized by GAM.

Conclusion

Throughout this analysis, it aimed to explore GAM and Mother's activism through the lens of maternity or family ideology with the added understanding of their government's view of them. For GAM, the state of civil war affected their relationship with the government as seen in the number of threats, harassment and murders that affected their organization. In contrast to the Mothers, they had an evolving relationship with the junta, initially being ignored to having a sense of limited immunity. Unquestionably, each movement's treatment depended on how the

state viewed them as the Mothers were viewed with a maternal focus while GAM was seen as part of the subversive category. Lastly, this affected the basis of their movements as the Mothers concentrated on their shared maternal identity while GAM utilized a family ideology.

Moreover, this study aimed to address the gaps in the existing literature as well as extend upon already studied topics. One of the major ways in which this was done was through comparing GAM and Mothers but moving past simply outlining their historical timelines. A distinction that was made was taking into consideration the government itself, differentiating between Argentina being under a dictatorship and Guatemala enduring a long-term civil war and the ramifications of that on the movements.

Moreover, scholars have documented the interactions of GAM and Mothers with their corresponding governments. Yet, the implications of these meetings had large effects on the movements themselves, as was studied. For GAM, their meetings with General Mejia contributed to their deteriorating relationship and the increasing amount of threats and acts of violence. In the case of the Mothers, their interactions resulted in being deemed “crazy” and receiving a limited immunity based on this junta-imposed label. The violent patterns demonstrated by the Argentinian junta and Guatemalan government were also discussed, with this study both outlining and comparing these patterns.

One of the most extensive discussion made was the various differences in each movement’s strategy in response to the disappeared. While the Mothers use of motherhood has been extensively studied, the comparison to GAM’s use of familism has not been entirely considered. Moreover, GAM’s inability to use motherhood ideals was acknowledged in previous studies, but not scrutinized. Most of the discourse for GAM surrounded their use of family

ideology in order to legitimize their movement. In all, this essay contributed towards creating an analytical comparison of Mutual Support Group and Mothers de Plaza de Mayo.

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