



Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Latin American Silhouettes)

By Marguerite Guzman Bouvard Brandeis University; Author of *The Path Through Grief: A Compassionate Guide*

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Revolutionizing Motherhood examines one of the most astonishing human rights movements of recent years. During the Argentine junta's Dirty War against subversives, as tens of thousands were abducted, tortured, and disappeared, a group of women forged the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and changed Argentine politics forever.

The Mothers began in the 1970s as an informal group of working-class housewives making the rounds of prisons and military barracks in search of their disappeared children. As they realized that both state and church officials were conspiring to withhold information, they started to protest, claiming the administrative center of Argentina the Plaza de Mayo for their center stage.

In this volume, Marguerite G. Bouvard traces the history of the Mothers and examines how they have transformed maternity from a passive, domestic role to one of public strength. Bouvard also gives a detailed history of contemporary Argentina, including the military's debacle in the Falklands, the fall of the junta, and the efforts of subsequent governments to reach an accord with the Mothers. Finally, she examines their current agenda and their continuing struggle to bring the murderers of their children to justice.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The 1976 Argentine junta that overthrew the ragged Peronista government launched a campaign of terror to crush dissent. "Ford Falcons without license plates would slide through the streets like sharks," says one witness, remembering nights when security forces "disappeared" hordes of people. Though many were tortured and executed in detention centers, junta leaders denied any knowledge of this. Determined to learn the fates of their sons and daughters, a group of middle-aged women who called themselves Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo braved beatings, threats, and abductions to spotlight the flagrant violations of human rights. This scholarly, somewhat dry book tells of their radicalization and activism, which helped galvanize world pressure against the junta and slow the tide of disappearances. Though stiff writing sometimes undermines their affecting, painful stories, this is an amazing and rewarding blueprint for cooperative struggle against abuses of power.

From Publishers Weekly

A group of ordinary Argentine women transformed by extraordinary events into a political force is the theme of this detailed study of human rights activism in Argentina. Bouvard's dense survey of the military junta and the Dirty War it waged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, during which tens of thousands disappeared, were kidnapped or were tortured, tells readers little that's been unreported. She charts new territory, however, in her meticulous and emotional recounting of how an informal group of working-class housewives banded together to seek their disappeared children. Her central thesis, that the Mothers have created a political role for maternity, is hammered home and supported with arguments from Hannah Arendt, but doesn't always convince. Bouvard counters criticism from some feminists that the Mothers cling to a maternal role and support a patriarchal structure, asserting that "They have redefined the private and public spheres and sought to create a political space where the two combine in their organization and political agenda." Revolutionizing Motherhood isn't an unflinching homage to the courageous women. Bouvard serves up a few critical asides herself, noting a Cuban trip the Mothers took with a seemingly blind eye to alleged and documented human rights violations there, and she disparages the Mother's alliance with the Front for Human Rights, a group, she claims, which had ulterior motives and divergent political goals.

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From Library Journal

Argentina was rich, modern, and semi-democratic until its economy faltered and left-wing violence paved the way for the brutal Dirty War of 1976-83. Disappearances and torture on the slightest suspicion were the response to any opposition to the military regimes. Typical was the Night of the Pencils, when 16 high school students protesting a rise in schoolbus fares disappeared. Only three returned. Fear was such that only a group of mothers dared publicly to defy the regime by demanding information about their missing. Their steely pacifism in the face of such danger made them a symbol of human rights internationally. Bouvard's work gives a more retrospective and up-to-date evaluation of the mothers' political style than does Jo Fisher's *Mothers of the Disappeared* (Zed, 1989) and John Simpson and Jana Bennett's *The Disappeared and the Mothers of the Plaza* (LJ 11/15/85), but all three are excellent choices for any library.

Louise Leonard, Univ. of Florida Libs., Gainesville

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