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MADRES DE PLAZA DE MAYO: ESTRATÉGIAS NARRATIVAS E ESPACIAIS

MADRES DE PLAZA DE MAYO: NARRATIVE AND SPATIAL STRATEGIES

ISADORA MONTEIRO

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Isadora Carraro Tavares Monteiro is an Architect and Urban Planner and has a Master's Degree in Architecture. She currently teaches at the Federal Institute of Minas Gerais, on the Santa Luzia campus, Brazil, where she develops research on the relationship between the city, narrative, and gender in Latin America. She works at the common borders of urbanism, literature, and the arts. isa.tavares.monteiro@gmail.com <http://lattes.cnpq.br/2295509324506866>

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Abstract

In 2021, *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, one of the most resilient and relevant social movements in Latin America, completes 44 years of existence. Their struggle for human rights runs through the history of the city of Buenos Aires and creates a paradigm for the relationship between social movements and the production of Latin American cities. The purpose of this article is to make a spatial investigation of the movement's trajectory and understand the relationship between the territorialities produced by the *Madres'* actions and the construction of the narratives that permeate the group and its members. Based on the concepts of spaces of appearance, by Hannah Arendt, and territory, by Rogerio Haesbaert, we intend to map the journey of the *Madres* from the house to the square and, later, to other territories. The research method involves the analysis of poems and prose from the book *El Corazón en la Escritura* and the mapping of the key spaces for the struggle, locating the trajectories and spatializing the group's narratives. The article concludes that the public-private and maternal-political binaries, common in the analysis of social movements headed by women, do not account for the territorial and narrative complexities of the *Madres* and do not do justice to the movement's contribution to *another* production of space and to the confrontation against issues commonly related to Latin American nations.

Keywords: Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires, Narrative, Social Movements, Latin America

In September 1983, in the surroundings of the *Plaza de Mayo*, in Buenos Aires, the people disappeared during the Argentine dictatorship witnessed their first experience of “embodiment¹”. Painted on paper, using the mold of other bodies (that also belonged to activists and protesters), the silhouettes were spread all around: glued to walls, fixed to metal bars, and hung in trees, the large sheets of paper occupied the square that, for hundreds of years, has been the stage of major political and social events in the Argentine capital. The action became known as *El Siluetazo* and consisted of the simple idea of making and exhibiting thousands of “empty” silhouettes, in a direct allusion to the unburied bodies of those tortured and killed by the dictatorship, between the years 1976 and 1983 (Figure 1). The proposal, idealized by the artists Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores, and Guillermo Kexel, was presented to the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*² on the eve of the third March of the Resistance, held shortly before the end of the regime (Longoni, Bruzzone, 2008). The *Madres* movement, headed by mothers who had their children kidnapped and killed during the military dictatorship, was already emerging, then, as one of the most relevant social movements in Latin America.

The partnership between the *Madres* and the artists in the production of the *siluetazos* reveals an important facet of the movement's strategy of action in confronting authoritarianism and seeking justice for lost children. The *Madres* took advantage of a raw material that goes beyond the materiality of posters and banners, as well as the power of speeches and manifestos. This raw material has become the primordial mark of most of the struggles and organizations born in the post-dictatorial period of Latin American countries: space. The mobilization of space as a tool does not disregard the city: the action of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, as well as the action of many other social movements in Latin America, leaves marks on the urban space, changes the dynamics of city life, and establishes a new paradigm for the power of social mobilizations in the creation of *another* kind of production of space.

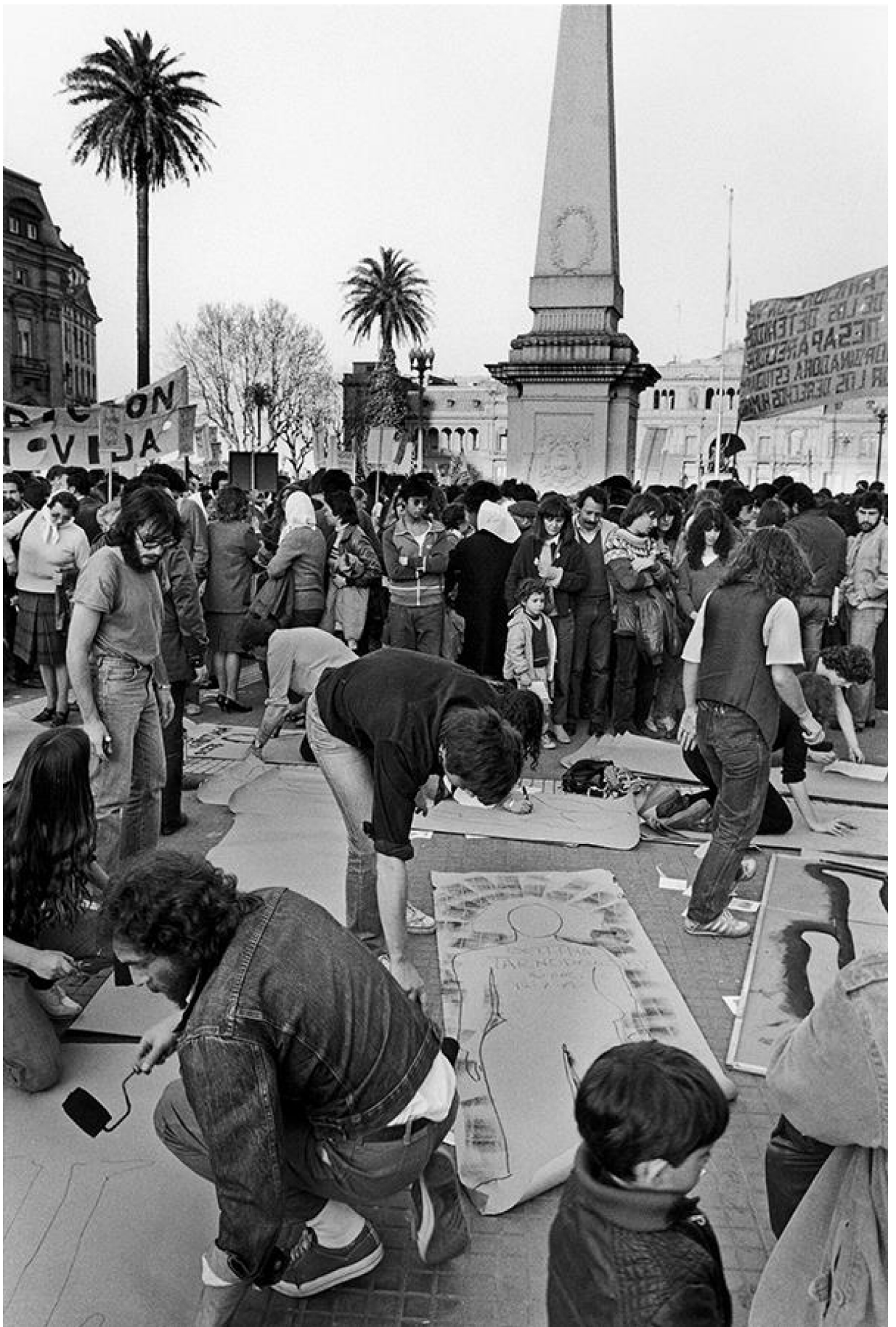


Fig. 1: El Siluetazo, held in 1983 during the Third *Marcha de la Resistencia*. Source: Eduardo Gil, 1983. Available at: <https://www.eduardogil.com/obras/siluetazo/14.jpg/>. Accessed 8 May 2021.

The *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* movement, as its name already announces, is born geographically situated, spatialized, mobilizing this urban resource that has always been paradigmatic on the Latin American soil. The *Plaza de Mayo*, the place chosen as a symbol and stage of the movement, is the center of civic life in Buenos Aires, the Argentine capital. Gathered at the *Plaza* for 44 years, its members march every week so as not to

be forgotten. Its territorialization, expressed through the movement performed in the space, which characterizes the rounds of every Thursday afternoon, has become a kind of stamp, the trademark of a new social movement formed almost exclusively by women. Spatialization, however, does not figure as the only strategy of action performed by the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. It also involves the vindication of their role as narrators: of the history of their children and the atrocities committed during the military dictatorship, or of their own history and role as women and a movement. The silent marches in the square, the pictures printed on large totems, the speeches given at events, the interviews, and documentaries elaborated over the years, are all, in their own way, a way of telling the stories that the official narrative has silenced.

Among all these devices, one stands out for its fundamentally narrative character, an almost literal approach to this desire to tell and retell stories. In the early 1990s, Argentine writer Leopoldo Brizuela organized the first literary workshop in partnership with the *Madres*, which aimed to present participants with a new expression and record tool (Ponzio, 2009). In these literary workshops (taking place throughout the years of 1990 and 2000), several texts and poems were produced by the *Madres* and, subsequently, published in book form. Among them, we highlight *Nuestros Sueños* (1991), *El Corazón en la Escritura* (1997) and *Pluma Revolucionaria* (2007).

The examples of *siluetazos* and literary writing workshops emphasize that the encounter between narrative and space is at the heart of the strategies of action of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. With this in mind, the aim of this article is to make a spatial investigation of the movement's trajectory and understand the relationship between the territorialities produced by the actions of the *Madres* and the construction of the narratives that permeate the group and its members. Based on the concepts of space of appearance, by Hannah Arendt, and territory, by Rogerio Haesbaert, we intend to map the journey of the *Madres* from the house to the square and, later, to other territories, through a critical view that is not fulfilled by the domestic/public or maternal/political dichotomy.

To locate these trajectories and narratives, the research uses two main methods:

Selection and analysis of poems and texts produced by the *Madres* during the literary workshops in the years of 1990 and 2000, mostly concentrated in the book *El Corazón en la Escritura* (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1997). The selection prioritized textual productions that mobilize spatial themes and resort to images of the house, the square, and other key spaces of the struggle as a way of narrating the trajectory of the *Madres* and articulating the movement's issues with their territorial practices. In addition to literary production, other texts and testimonies were collected through the survey of interviews — granted to researchers and the media over these 44 years — and institutional materials produced by the many arms the movement has today³;

Mapping of the key spaces of the *Madres'* struggle, pointing out the nodal points of the movement's territorial action over Buenos Aires' urban fabric (Figure 2). For the cartographic production, we carried out a survey of the places where some of the *Madres'* children and grandchildren were kidnapped or last seen⁴. The geolocation of the *Plaza de Mayo*, the Former *ESMA* (Higher School of Mechanics of the Navy) and the *Villa 15* were also included, locations that will be explored throughout items 2 and 3 of this article. The production of the map is part of the research's spatialization strategy, which is fundamental to the interpretation of the intersection between narrative and territory.

The research suggests that the trajectory of the movement, both spatial and narrative, does not fit in the linearities that commonly surround the analysis carried out on the group. In addition to the house-square and maternal-political vectors, the paper suggests an interpretation of the *Madres* trajectory as a network of territorial and narrative vectors in constant expansion. A network that does not comply with the norms related to the dichotomies frequently imposed on movements headed by women, from the middle of the 20th century.

2 From the House to the Square

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt (1998) discusses the constitution of the public sphere and the relationships this sphere establishes with its subjects. Using the Greek *polis* as a measure for the notion of public, the author defines what she calls spaces of appearance, the space where "(...) I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly" (Arendt, 1998, pp. 198-199). After drawing a long historical panorama about the change in the political and social spheres and their relations with the public sphere over time, she concludes

that the very fabric of what we consider to be reality is defined by this “capacity to appear”, to attest, through the presence of the other, what we see and hear.

The choice of the *Plaza de Mayo* as a key space in the struggle of the *Madres* is easily justified in view of the concept of spaces of appearance. In a context of repression and authoritarianism, in which barbarism and genocide relied on refined State mechanisms to remain anonymous, it is expected that a movement based on bringing these atrocities to light would resort to this space of appearance, not only for an obvious matter of visibility but for the sharing of that common space as a way to keep alive, for those women, the certainty that this was, in fact, a reality.

However, although the spatial analyses of the *Madres* movement are usually focused on the space of the square, it is important to remember the role that the house played (and still plays) in the construction of the organization's mobilization networks. The house, as a space and as a symbolic place, is an important element in the trajectory of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* movement. Present even before the genesis of the group — since most of the actions that culminated in the abduction of the people disappeared during the dictatorship took place inside their own homes — the house had its semantics transformed, extended, and adapted, following the changes undergone by the movement itself.

The house, symbol of the family, the motherhood, and the performance of femininity in the totalizing and colonized narrative of women's history arises in the *Madres* activism with new functions and meanings. The moment that inaugurates the house as one of the nodal points of the movement's trajectory already introduces it as a scenario of terror, from the invasion and kidnapping of children by the military forces under the justification that they were subversives and enemies of the nation (some of these locations are shown in Figure 2). Punctuated in several reports and interviews, this moment is usually the last time mothers and children saw each other.

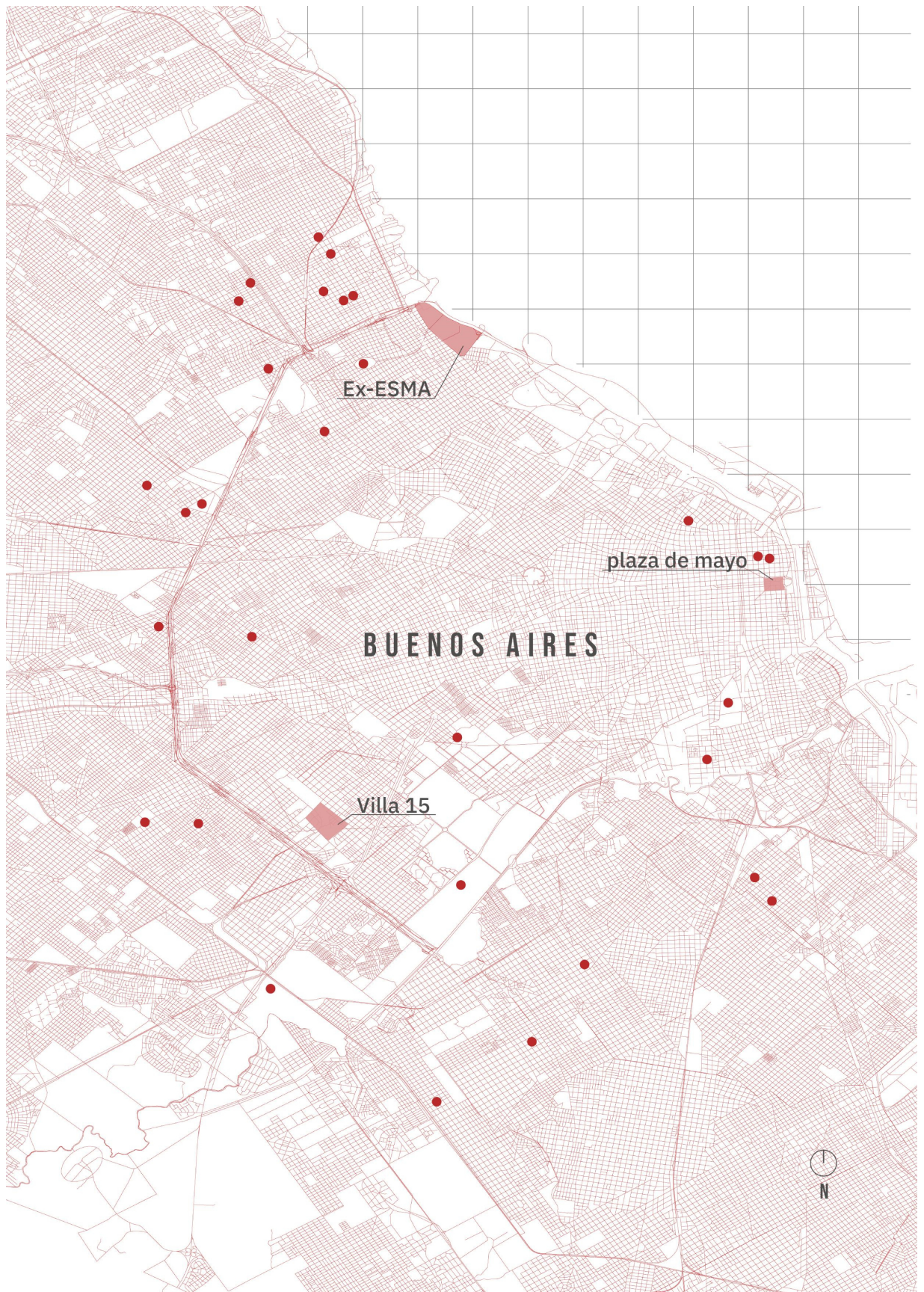


Fig. 2: Map of the places where the children and grandchildren of the *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* were kidnapped or last seen (1975-1979). Authors' map, based on the information available at: <https://www.abuelas.org.ar/caso>. Accessed 8 May 2021.
Source (cartographic base): Open Street Maps. Available at: <https://bit.ly/343017a>. Accessed 8 May 2021.

The brutality of the military's forcible entries into the house environment becomes, then, a metaphor for the invasion of the public into the private, the combination of the political with the maternal. During reminiscences of family moments, the image of military men breaking down the door arises as the moment when the military dictatorship stopped being just a word or an image to materialize within the physical and symbolic space of the house. This matter becomes very clearly in the speech of Porota Colás Meroño in an excerpt from the book *El Corazón en la Escritura*, in which several *Madres* share memories about meals and recipes they made as a family:

Before, when we talked about the disappearance of our children, I used to say that there were many dishes that I no longer prepared: one of them was that. *Because even these things that seem so insignificant, and are not, the military dictatorship also influenced.* They tore apart the family, we could no longer get together, some were not around and others we did not have the desire, eating with family and friends is talking, laughing, playing, is projecting, is loving (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1997, p. 26, our translation⁵ and italics).

However, it is from the same houses that many of these mothers begin to build their journey as *Madres*, organizing meetings to weave strategies and exchange experiences. Upon the first scenario (the tragic one), they began to build a new one, of union and organization. After meeting each other in the corridors and rooms of public offices, where they went daily in search of information, they began to meet in other places, especially in apartments and houses provided by the participating *Madres* themselves.

The *Abuelas* recall these meetings in one of the excerpts from the book *La Historia de Abuelas: 30 años de búsqueda* (The Story of the Grandmothers: 30 Years of Search).

When they met in private homes, they took precautions not to be discovered. If it were in a building, they would get together at *siesta* time to avoid crossing the doorman. They avoided using the elevator because of the noise, lowered the blinds and spoke almost in a whisper. Many of them stopped smoking so that the smell would not give them away. "The first place where we started to work was the apartment that the *Madres* had, they lent us a room. We stayed there for a while, but as it was very small, when we could, we rented an apartment at 700 Montevideo Street, [see Figure 3]. We also met in the houses of other *Abuelas* (...)", says Raquel [Radío de Marizcurrena]. (*Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, 2007, p. 15, our translation⁶).



Fig. 3: *Abuelas* gathered in the apartment situated at 700 Montevideo Street, the decade of 1980. Unknown author. Source: *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, 2017, p. 59. Available at: <https://www.abuelas.org.ar/publicacion?pagina=1> . Accessed 8 May 2021.

Regarding the change in the role of the private sphere and the insertion of activism in the daily life of the *Madres*, Hebe Bonafini, in an interview, recalls the house as a place where "women like us lived in an isolated world that had an end at the front doors. [...] When you live like this you do not know what rights you have got... you do not understand anything" (Howe, 2006, p. 46). The memory of the house as space of restriction and isolation does not arise by chance. In a context of dictatorship and authoritarianism, the family stronghold

based on the home functioned, both in narrative and practice, as an anti-subversion center, a refuge against rebellion, where the feminine role would ensure comfort and education for the youth.

Despite happening in different ways for each *Madre*, the breaking of this sphere aiming at the optimization of their engagement with the children's search — which had already started from the moment the struggle found shelter inside houses and apartments — usually involved the confrontation with husbands and family members. Estela Carloto, leader of the *Abuelas of Plaza de Mayo*, tells in an interview that

One by one, as we saw what was happening and reached the devastating conclusion that our children weren't going to come home or get in touch, we realized we couldn't remain passive any more. We began to take action. One day, for example, I said to my husband, 'You stay home - I'm going out.' I went to speak to lawyers, politicians and soldiers, trying to find out where my daughter was" (Carloto, 2017, p. 488).

This *in-between* space occupied by the *Madres* — this daring act of leaving the sphere of the house and, at the same time, the insistence on performing the role of mother — protected their activism from the direct confrontation with the military forces, because pursuing and torturing them would be pursuing and torturing the "angels of the home". This location between the house and the square was used as a strategy by the *Madres*, who relied on the images of the maternal ideal to negotiate their permanence in the struggle. But staying at home, even if it involved meetings and bringing other *Madres* together, was not enough. A day came when they said "enough, enough waiting, enough looking out the window, you must go out into the street" (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1997, p. 61, our translation⁷). In the same way the regime came into their homes, taking their children from them, they would also go out, they would go to the streets, to that square, they would also mix motherhood and politics, private and public. When they left the sphere of the house, they made the transition from individual to collective struggle (Figure 4). Hebe Bonafini's testimony addresses this change and the choice of the square:

Many people wonder why, having other institutions, the *Madres* went to the *Plaza*, and why we feel so good at the *Plaza*. And this is something we think about now, we did not think about it back then. And the more I talk to people who know more than we do, the more we realize why the *Madres* were created. And we created the group because we did not feel well at other institutions; there was always an office that triggered fear, there was always something more bureaucratic. *And in the Plaza, we were all the same*. This "What happened?", "How was it?". We were all like one another; our children had been taken from us all, the same thing happened to all, we had been to the same places. And it was as if there was no distance at all. That is why the *Plaza* brought us together. That is why the *Plaza* has consolidated (Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1997, p. 16, our translation⁸ and italics).

When they decided, for the first time, to walk in circles in the center of the *Plaza*, in a strategy to remain in place and confuse the police, they started a march that was still incipient but would last for many decades, until today, changing the dynamics of public space, demanding people to stop and look, and creasing the tile floor, week after week, to ensure that forgetting is not an option.



Fig. 4: Abuela Clara Jurado, protesting in Plaza de Mayo. Unknown date. Author: Daniel García. Source: Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2017, p. 37. Available at: <https://www.abuelas.org.ar/publicacion?pagina=1>. Accessed 8 May 2021.

From this moment on, *Plaza de Mayo* became the perfect definition of the concept of space of appearance, by Hannah Arendt. The transfer of the struggle to the public sphere is directly related to the idea that “every activity performed in public can attain an excellence never matched in privacy; for excellence, by definition, the presence of others is always required, and this presence needs the formality of the public (...)” (Arendt, 1998, p. 49). The possibility of seeing and being seen in the square (compared to the privacy — now unwanted — of the home) is reported in the poem by Hebe Bonafini (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1997, p. 70, our translation⁹):

*So many doors come to my mind
Those of my childhood home, always unlocked
Those of my school, open, clean
Those in the delivery room, strong, light, swing doors*

*and suddenly the ones from police stations, military quarters
and the Church
shutting violently at our faces knowing that
behind them, certainly, there were our children*

*So many doors, so much life
so much death behind them.*

*That is why the most beautiful thing is the Square
because it has no doors.
That is why everything there is clearer.*

The modification of the landscape of the *Plaza*, which occurs through the presence and movement of women's bodies around the pyramid, goes far beyond an aesthetic mobilization of the image of the square as an element of political struggle. The *Madre's* embodied action becomes a territorialization strategy, a spatialization that has become fundamental for the movement's longevity; simultaneously, this same presence also modifies the space itself, from the moment its occupation interferes in the relationship with the surroundings and resignifies the place of the square for the population of the Argentine capital. On this phenomenon and its relation to the concept of territory, Haesbaert comments:

The visualization of the *Plaza de Mayo* as the territory of the *Madres*, therefore, does not remain closed in on

We can affirm that the territory is relational not only in the sense of always being defined within a set of historical-social relations but also in the sense, highlighted by Godelier, of including a complex relationship between social processes and material space (...). In addition, another very important consequence when emphasizing the relational sense of the territory is the perception that it does not imply a simplistic reading of space such as rooting, stability, delimitation, and/or "border". Precisely because it is relational, the territory is also movement, fluidity, interconnection — in short and in a broader sense, temporality (Haesbaert, 2004, p. 82, our translation

itself and does not assume that the mere occupation of space is the fundamental character for the establishment of this territorial connection. What defines the movement's territorialization is the conviction that the many years of occupation of that physical space caused the social processes connected to its modification, in an equation that is never fully balanced. Using the metonymy of the square bench, María del Carmen Berroca poetically exemplifies this idea:

The benches of the *Plaza de Mayo* know that, even when there is no one in the *Plaza*, our children are there, always present, and they are there because the *Plaza* has no metal bars, and they loved freedom and fought for it. *The benches of the Plaza are alive. We give them that life* (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1997, p. 75, our translation¹⁰ and italics).

Haesbaert's (2004) definition of territory, however, also leaves clues for understanding what I consider to be a second phase of the movement's trajectory. As in Haesbaert's concept, the relational construction of a territory of the *Madres* does not presuppose its rooting to the borders of the *Plaza de Mayo*. The movement, fluidity, and interconnection inherent in the concept took their fight to other possible spaces of appearance and changed not only the arenas of action and occupation but the very limits of whatever the *Madres* considered being the causes of their struggle. Over the years, especially after the democratization process, the space is no longer just a tool or device and becomes itself part of the causes for which the *Madres* fight. For more than 40 years, living in the space *between* the square and the house, tensioning territories and temporalities, the *Madres* ensured that the radius of the walk-in-circles expanded, embracing other causes, other challenges, reaching beyond the contours of the square and spreading to others territories.

3 Beyond the house and the square

Lynn Stephen (1997), in her book entitled *Women and Social Movements in Latin America: Power from Below*, argues about the division of social, political, cultural, and economic life into a private-female and a public-male sphere. For her, there needs to be "(...) an alternative analysis that links individual women's social, political, economic, and cultural worlds through a unity of experience, not a public/private dichotomy" (Stephen, 1997, p. 7). The analysis of the *Madres'* trajectory as a linear journey from the house — private, maternal, and feminine — to the square — political and inherently masculine — encapsulates their activism in a dichotomy that, besides imprecise, prevents other ways of reading their narrative and spatial strategies.

In addition to challenging the physical and symbolic space of the house as a place of privacy and passivity — bringing into it the movement's meetings and gatherings— and the square as this public and masculine arena — taking into it their women and mother bodies —, the *Madres* did not limit their space incursions to this square-house vector. Two initiatives carried out after the period of re-democratization exemplify the deviations and expansions of the strategies used and the causes defended by the movement.

The first expansion beyond the contours of the *Plaza* that exemplifies this movement started at the end of the military dictatorship in the 1980s, and remains, until today, as an important arena of debates, controversies, and, mainly, new and powerful reflections. Less than 15 kilometers from *Plaza de Mayo*, one of the places that staged the barbarism and violence of the Argentine military regime remains a historic mark in the urban fabric of Buenos Aires. The ESMA — *Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada* —, which was, until the beginning of the dictatorship, just one of the city's military institutions, became the largest clandestine prison and torture center of the last Argentine military dictatorship (see location on the map of Figure 2). The estimate is that 5.000 people went "missing" inside the buildings of the school (Pauchulo, 2009)

With the end of the regime, proposals for the demolition and the construction of a park on the site were fiercely opposed by the victims' families, who understood the initiative as a way of erasing the forensic vestiges and the memory of those who had been tortured and killed there (Feld, 2017). In view of the proposals, the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* directed their efforts to ensure this space, the scene of the torture and murder of their children, was also a territory of the *Madres* in its own right. After years of debates and mobilizations, in 2004, on the 28th anniversary of the military coup, the space was vacated by the military

and became a *Space for Memory and the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights* (Feld, 2017). Within the *Madres* movement, however, a dilemma was established between the values of the past and the values of the present/future, sheltered by the place: while members of the *Línea Fundadora* and *Abuelas* groups believed that the space should be left intact, to serve as judicial proof of the crimes committed during the dictatorship, the *Madres* of the *Asociación* bet on a "life" approach, in which the memory would be preserved and promoted through artistic and cultural activities and interventions¹¹.

In 2007, even with the definitive end of military activities on the perimeter of the former ESMA, the sharing of the buildings between different associations and the decision to preserve the main places of torture and incarceration almost as they originally were, the tensions over this space were not put to an end. Involved in a temporality paradigm in which the past, present, and future clashes and the possibilities of occupation put the actors in motion, the former ESMA meets the requirements related to the definition of territory outlined by Haesbaert (2004). Its semantics of space-problem, which creates dissent, reorganizes (or, in the best sense, disorganizes) the territorial logic centered on the house-square axis, becoming a new possibility of occupation and action for the movement.

In the same opportunity to expand the causes and territorialities embraced by the *Madres*, the second expansion beyond the contours of the *Plaza* is the *Sueños Compartidos* (Shared Dreams) initiative. In 2005, after a fire destroyed several areas in the neighborhood known as *Villa 15*, the *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* started the program, which aimed to rebuild homes and provide jobs and training in the construction area for the community (see location on the map in Figure 2). The area of the neighborhood where the initiative started is also known as *Ciudad Oculta* or *Hidden City*. According to the supplement *Cortamos el Cordón*, published by *Asociación* and dedicated to the history of the projects developed by the group, the name is almost literal: during the 1978 World Cup, the military erected a wall around the community to hide from the tourists the "planned misery in a country that proclaimed itself right and human" (Berenguer, 2011, p. 1, our translation¹²).

The *Sueños Compartidos* program, more than 30 years later, claimed *Ciudad Oculta*, hidden and silenced by the military dictatorship, as a possible territory for the *Madres*. In the pilot project of *Villa 15*, besides the construction of houses, the program also expected the reactivation of *Elefante Blanco* (White Elephant), an abandoned hospital that had its construction resumed by *Asociación*, which envisioned the transformation of the building into a community center, where kitchens, dining halls, a gymnasium, a sewing workshop, and a nursery for the children of the workers involved in the construction (Berenguer, 2011). The project later became part of a financing program of the Argentine Federal Government, which allocated funds for not-for-profit housing initiatives. More than 20 new projects were built in several cities in the country, expanding the program's scope of action beyond the limits of Buenos Aires (Palombi, 2019). As with the circular movements performed in the center of the square, the *Madres'* action trajectory now returns to its starting point: the house. However, this space is now substantiated into a collective cause, a common territory, in which the private-female binomial does not apply.

In addition to these two experiences, there are several others: the creation of the *Universidad Popular Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, the *Biblioteca Popular Julio Huasi*, the *Librería de las Madres*, a university, a library, and a bookstore, respectively, among others. These initiatives, headed by the *Madres* of the *Asociación*, are part of a "memoria de acción" project (Pauchulo, 2009, p. 33), which arises from the expansion of the movement's objectives beyond the search for people disappeared during the Argentine dictatorship and which invests in the continuity of their children's struggle for social justice and freedom as the best way to celebrate and remember them. It is also important to mention the immense international collaboration network, which transported *Plaza de Mayo* around the world and transformed the cause of the *Madres* into a model for the Human Rights struggle.

4 Conclusion

"(...) The political realm rises directly out of acting together, the 'sharing of words and deeds.' Thus action not only has the most intimate relationship to the public part of the world common to us all, but is the one activity which constitutes it." (Arendt, 1998, p. 198). Hannah Arendt's reflection introduces a new possibility to understand the struggle history of the *Madres of Plaza de Mayo*: more than a walk from the private to the public, from the house to the square, the territorialization produced by the bodies of the *Madres* is exactly what creates the public, which composes the fabric of the political sphere.

While writing poems or marching in the *Plaza* (and beyond it), the movement mobilized narrative and spatial strategies not only to occupy a besieged and masculine space but to construct a possibility for *another* common territory. In the expansion of the movement's objectives and developments, the character of the *Madres'* action is also updated, as we can see in the slogans of the *Marcha Anual de la Resistencia* — Annual

March of the Resistance – demanding social justice, fight against hunger and unemployment, non-payment of external debt, and the union of Latin America.

In a continent that still struggles against its colonial inheritance, that suffers from neoliberal advances, and that witnesses, with fear, the awakening of a new fascist wave always on the prowl, the resilience of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* and their unwavering struggle, constantly in expansion, are anchor points. A present-precedent that challenges the political, social and urban configurations of Latin American cities and contributes by giving voice to social movements that resist in the struggle for justice and freedom in the Global South.

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1 I develop the arguments of this article in the research *Cartographic Narratives: space and women's literature in Latin America* (Monteiro, 2019). I would like to thank Renata Moreira Marquez for her advice and precious contributions.

2 Throughout the article, the name of the movement will be kept in Spanish, its original language, to maintain its semantic notions and spatial references. The same goes for the expression *Plaza de Mayo* (Ponzio, 2009).

3 The *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* movement, already in its first year, added a subgroup called *Abuelas (grandmothers) de Plaza de Mayo*, which gathered the *Madres* who, besides looking for their children, were also looking for the whereabouts of their grandchildren, who, for the most part, were still being gestated at the time of the abduction. In 1986, however, due to divergences regarding the exhumation or not of the mass graves found after the trial of the main dictatorship officials and the divergences regarding the continuity of the movement after the re-democratization, the *Madres* movement was divided into two large groups: the *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* and *Madres de Plaza de Mayo - Línea Fundadora* (for more on the history of the movement, see Gorini, 2006, 2008). In the context of the article, however, the *Madres* movement is still understood as a unity, as it is believed that all groups, even in their differences, collaborated in the construction of the struggle and in the development of spatial and narrative strategies.

4 Survey based on the data available on the *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* website, *Nuestros Nietos* section. Available at: <https://www.abuelas.org.ar>. Accessed: 9 May 2021.

5 From the original in Spanish: "*Antes, cuando contábamos la experiencia de la desaparición de nuestros hijos, yo decía que había muchas comidas que yo ya no hacía: una era ésta. Porque hasta en estas cosas que parecen tan insignificantes, y no lo son, también influyó la dictadura militar. Nos deshicieron la familia, ya no nos podíamos reunir, unos no estaban y otros no teníamos ganas, la comida en familia y con amigos es charlar, es reír, es bromear, es proyectar, es amar.*"

6 From the original in Spanish: "*Cuando se reunían en casas particulares tomaban recaudos para no ser descubiertas. Si era en un edificio, se juntaban a la hora de la siesta para no cruzarse con el encargado. Evitaban usar el ascensor por los ruidos, bajaban las persianas y hablaban casi susurrando. Muchas de ellas dejaron de fumar para que el olor no las delatara. 'El primer lugar donde empezamos a funcionar fue el departamento que tenían las Madres, quienes nos prestaron una habitación. Estuvimos ahí un tiempo, pero como era muy chica cuando pudimos alquilamos un departamento en Montevideo al 700. Además nos reuníamos en casas de otras Abuelas (...)', cuenta Raquel [Radio de Marizcurrena].*"

7 From the original in Spanish: "*basta, basta de esperar, basta de mirar detrás de la ventana, hay que salir a la calle*".

8 From the original in Spanish: "*Mucha gente se pregunta por qué habiendo otros organismos las madres fuimos a la Plaza, y por qué nos sentimos tan bien en la Plaza. Y esto es una cosa que la pensamos ahora, no la pensamos ese día; y cuanto más hablo con la gente que sabe más que nosotros, más nos damos cuenta por qué se crearon las Madres. Y nos creamos porque en otros organismos no nos sentíamos bien cerca; había siempre un escritorio de por medio, había siempre una cosa más burocrática. Y en la Plaza éramos todas iguales. Ese '¿qué te pasó?', '¿cómo fue?'. Éramos una igual a la otra; a todas nos había llevado hijos, a todas nos pasaba lo mismo, habíamos ido a los mismos lugares. Y era como que no habría ningún tipo de distanciamiento. Por eso es que la Plaza agrupó. Por eso es que la Plaza consolidó.*"

9 From the original in Spanish: "*Vienen a mi mente tantas puertas / las de mi casa de infancia, siempre sin llave / las de mi escuela, abiertas, limpias / las de la sala de partos, fuertes, suaves, de vaivén // y de repente las de las comisarías, los cuarteles y la / iglesia / cerrándose con fuerza en nuestras propias caras sabiendo que / allí detrás seguro estaban nuestros hijos // Cuántas puertas cuánta vida / cuánta muerte detrás de ellas. // Por eso lo más lindo es la Plaza / porque no tiene puertas. / Por eso allí todo es más claro.*"

10 From the original in Spanish: "*Los bancos de la Plaza de Mayo saben que aunque no haya nadie en la Plaza nuestros hijos están ahí, siempre presentes, y están ahí porque la plaza no tiene rejas y ellos amaban la libertad y lucharon por ella. Los bancos de la plaza tienen vida. Esa vida se la damos nosotros.*"

11 For more controversies around ESMA, see FELD, 2017.

12 From the original in Spanish: "*la miseria planificada en un país que autoproclamaban derecho y humano*".