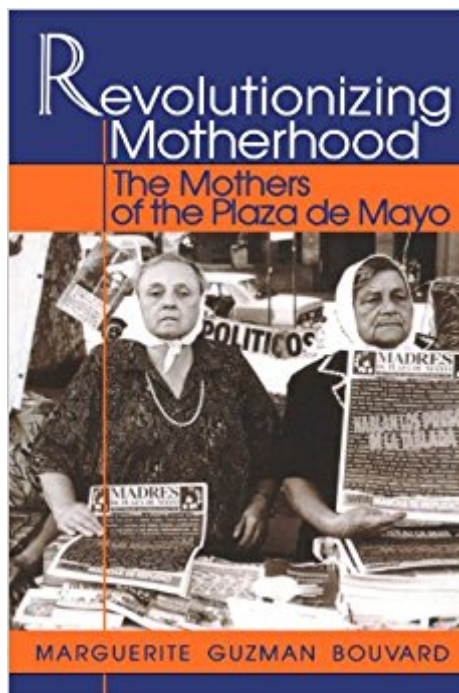




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# Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers Of The Plaza De Mayo (Latin American Silhouettes)



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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.

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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I enjoyed it a lot. It is a great book. However, it presents only the story of "the Mothers of plaza de Mayo," but neglects to mention the other relevant facts. I believe it needs to be read with other books, particularly history books, or a better understanding of the situation in Argentina at the moment, because the disappeared ones not necessary were involved with the Montoneros (the paramilitary group that defacto government was after). So, in order for us to develop an objective understanding of the situation during this period in time, I believe it should be read with other books, particularly history ones. The struggle they went through was atrocious, the images are too strong,

so it is hard to be objective when you hear the recollections of other people who lived during that time, particularly for us Argentinians that were born after this defacto government. People that does not know the Argentinian history and what went on at the moment; whom have not been able to hear accounts from people that lived back then either; may develop a really bias view as to what the scenario was like. The situations was extremely complex, it still is. The Argentinian society has an enormous complexity because all the things we have gone as a country since we formed our first government in 1810. And, the only way to understand it is by knowing its history.

Book assigned for college class. Great book and will hold a great place in my bookshelf.

good

This is an academic look at the organization of middle-aged Argentine mothers that began in the wake of widespread political and state sponsored terrorism in the period of 1976-1982, more commonly called the Dirty War. It began as a network of mothers who met while trying in vain to search for their children who had been `disappeared' by the government and grew into an internationally recognized and admired group committed to changing the structure of the Argentine political system from the bottom up. This book focuses on the journey of these women from traditional housewives, many with no formal education, confined to the private sphere of home and family, to a highly politicized, ever present and very out spoken activist organization. They have taken the traditional role of `mother' and used it to their advantage to bring to light the atrocities committed by the military junta against their children. As the title suggests, their organization has revolutionized the concept of motherhood by taking the concerns and duties of mothers out of the private sphere into the public and even international political arena. This book is an interesting documentation of the group and includes interviews with many members as well as commentary from many Argentine and international publications about the Mothers. It discusses their activities from the group's conception during the Dirty War through the transition to democracy as well as their continuing struggle in Argentine political life today. The book also documents the enormous obstacles they faced and continue to face economically, socially, and within their own families as well as their political struggles. It also talks about their interaction and reception in the international sphere, as they captured the attention of human rights and women's organizations from all over the world. It even discusses the ideological split among the Mothers after the return to democracy in 1982 that caused some Mothers to break away from the original group to form another group of

Mothers with slightly different ideologies. One of the most interesting aspects of this book is the focus on the development of the women themselves. A great deal of time is devoted to the transformation that has taken place among these women as they came together to find solace in each other that only someone experiencing the purgatory of not knowing the fate of their children could offer. It documents the courage, dedication, successes and disappointments of a group of women who came together to help each other look for answers. It is detailed documentation of a very personal and painful journey of political awakening through collective struggle and pain. It is one of the most valuable and moving aspects of this book. By focusing on this personal transformation, one begins to understand the almost incomprehensible corruption and brutality of the government. For these women, protesting meant standing in the face all traditional social, religious and cultural roles for women, especially middle-aged women. By the end of the book, one can't help but share in their frustrations and pain as they continue to fight for the integrity of the family and the supreme sanctity of human life. It is ironic that it was precisely because they were quintessential Argentine mothers that they became political activists that began to transform the concept of motherhood and the role of women in Argentine society. The abduction of their children was not only a painful, emotional loss, but also a direct assault on the institution of the family. It is interesting to note that throughout the book they emphasize their occupation, as a mother, has remained intact. However, the activities involved with being a mother have changed. To them, now to be a mother also meant fighting for the rights of their children, left voiceless by the government and carrying on their children's work and memory in their absence. This book is an excellent source of information about the Mothers themselves as well as about the atmosphere of Argentina as a whole during this time. It has many pictures of the mothers from the past and present and mixes academic fact easily with first person accounts, quotes and interview. It equally discusses successes and mistakes of the group, as well as various controversies that have surrounded the group's history. It's content and style make it an emotional and informative book.

I was directed to read this for a class. I had no idea that it would cause me to change my way of thinking. We all know that the atrocities of disappearances exist, and we might even place a bit of distance between ourselves and the subjects of this book so we can feel better about our own place in life. However, getting close to this subject brings an awareness and sense that something needs to be done, not donation of money, or thinking about it every now and then, (although these actions help) but everyday we need to be doing something. What the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo did was revolutionary. What they did, and how they went about organizing, spreading the word and surviving

as they did in the roles that they were as mothers unfamiliar with is astounding. We can learn a lot from the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. I hope that everyone who has been politically disheartened or disenfranchised reads this book! I believe the other review on this book may have articulated the response to it more thoroughly; nonetheless, I hope to get across that this is a must-read for those interested in social justice issues, activism and more.

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