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Motherhood, Public Memory and Human Rights Advocacy: A Comparative Analysis of the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo

by Julia Minin

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SUPERVISOR: Oswaldo Ruiz-Chiriboga
Central European University

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Abstract

In this thesis, I will explore the connections between two civil society organizations that have advocated for human rights in their countries since the late 20th century. The committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina have several key areas of overlap; engagement with public memory, providing venues for coping with individual and communal trauma and the gendered identity of motherhood. I will explore the ways in which these groups organically formed around experiences of loss and how each developed into official civil society organizations in their own countries. In exploring the question of why shared grief and the identity of motherhood contributed in both cases to the blossoming of radical and highly influential human rights advocacy, I will show that there are broad lessons to be learned from comparing both groups' activities.

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I. Introduction

There is a broad trend worldwide of mothers playing active roles in justice-seeking initiatives related to human rights abuses perpetrated against loved ones. This thesis will focus on two case studies of groups who identify their human rights work through the status of motherhood. The two mothers groups, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, and the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia, are striking in their similarity. These particular cases were chosen because both organizations stand out in their activism. Not only are both groups quite radical in their human rights work, but they have also made substantial changes in their societies. As a model for future human rights work, analyzing the various dimensions of both organizations' work may provide important lessons for similar groups.

The cases demonstrate three key overlapping elements: engagement with the issue of public memory, the psychology of collective trauma and the gendered aspect of motherhood. This thesis will explore the ways in which these two movements developed through engagement with the three aforementioned factors. Growing from grassroots collectives of mothers who share a common experience of loss, both cases demonstrate the importance of fact finding, justice seeking and memorialization in cases of large-scale human rights violations. Under the broad umbrella of public memory, the various projects and initiatives enacted by the mothers will show a link between grief, memorialization and justice. This thesis will then go on to demonstrate the interrelationship between healing from trauma on an individual level and greater societal healing through justice seeking and civil society participation in the creation of public memory. Finally, this thesis will explore the ways in which motherhood and its gendered societal implications in both cases drove the action of the groups and contributed to their successes and public reception.

Methodologically, this thesis will use a combination of anthropological sources including first hand interviews with members of each organization conducted by various researchers, academic studies on gender, politics and human rights and psychological studies on trauma. By coalescing these interdisciplinary sources, this thesis will provide a comparative analysis of two civil society organizations' work and their commonalities in human rights activism. Viewed through this academically holistic lens, the work of the organizations will present connections between emotion, psychology, social justice and societal progress providing a novel perspective for human rights advocacy.

There is a body of work that has already begun to study the ways in which the respective groups have mobilized around memory projects and collective grief, however, there is yet to be an in depth direct comparison between the two groups, elaborating on the larger lessons learned from their work. This thesis is unique in its focused and tailored comparison of the groups' activities, seeking to draw out all of the convergences between them and understand how they play a role in individual, communal and societal healing. This thesis will show that the projects and initiatives of the mothers' groups have had significance on an individual level, in creating communities of healing and therapeutic practice. There is also evidence of healing on a broader national level in each case, contributing to a greater public awareness of human rights abuses in each country and leading to large-scale permanent changes.

II. Background Information

The Committee of Solders' Mothers of Russia

The Committee of Solders' Mothers of Russia (CSMR) started as a grassroots organization and developed quickly into a robust non-governmental organization (NGO) in the 1990s and early 2000s when the group was at the height of its success. The group celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2019, officially operating as an NGO since 1989.[1] The structure of the organization is built around two central offices in Moscow and St. Petersburg with oversight over 300 regional branches spanning the Russian Federation.[2] The functions of the central versus regional offices vary greatly, ranging from advocacy for large structural military reform to small chapters providing therapeutic community meetings for mourners of military loss and memorialization initiatives such as books of photographs of fallen soldiers.[3] The group came about in a time of great change in Russia with the blossoming of Soviet Civil Society in the late 1980s through the policy of *Glasnost,* to the democratization of Russia after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.[4] Alongside the large societal changes taking place, the CSMR was founded against the backdrop of three wars: the Russian war in Afghanistan[5], and the first and second wars in Chechnya.[6] These wars presented a unique situation to the Russian military in that they were asymmetrical in nature, frustrating the traditional military strategists of the Russian army.[7] As a result, the military suffered great losses; statistics differ on how many casualties were suffered by Soviet soldiers in

1 "The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia (CSMR,)" Laureates, The Right Livelihood Foundation, Accessed May 26, 2020, https://www.rightlivelihoodaward.org/laureates/the-committee-of-soldiers-mothers-of-russia-csmr/.

2 Judith Matloff, "Russia's Powerhouses of Dissent: Mothers," *Christian Science Monitor* 92, no. 64 (February 24, 2000) :1.

3 Serguei Alex Oushakine, "The Politics of Pity: Domesticating Loss in a Russian Province." *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 2 (2006): 297–311.

4 George E. Hudson, "Civil Society in Russia: Models and Prospects for Development". *The Russian Review* 62, 2 (2003) :212–22.

5 Rafael Reuveny and Aseem Prakash, "The Afghanistan War and the Breakdown of the Soviet Union." *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 4 (1999): 693-708. The war in Afghanistan lasted from 1979 through 1986.

6 Tracey C. German, *Russia's Chechen War* (London: Routledge 2003.) The two wars in Chechnya occurred between 1994 and 1996 and again in 1999 to 2009.

7 "Asymmetrical Warfare," Topics, The Rand Corporation, https://www.rand.org/topics/asymmetric-warfare.html. The term "asymmetric warfare" is described by the RAND Corporation as "conflicts between nations or groups that have disparate military capabilities and strategies." This style of warfare is typical of one traditional army and one insurgency or guerilla army that uses differing strategies of warfare.

Afghanistan, but some estimates are as high as 50,000.[8] In Chechnya, the figures were even grimmer, with loss of military life accumulating to 25,000 within just two years.[9] Additionally, due to mandatory military service laws carried over from the Soviet Union after its break up, many of the casualties were young men; the draft affected all of the geographically widespread Soviet territories as well as the whole of Russia.[10] A sense of national trauma developed because of the extreme violence of the Afghan and Chechen wars, especially in light of the already immense military losses of World War II.[11] After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia began the process of entering the Council of Europe (COE,) which presupposed a series of necessary legal reforms affecting human rights. In particular, every COE member state was required to guarantee an alternative service option for the military draft.[12]However, the Russian Federation did not make this option available even to students for continued studies or medical reasons, prompting the CSMR to make alternative draft options a central tenet of their work.[13]

A pattern of lack of transparency between the Russian state and the families of those whose loved ones were fulfilling their military service increased during the war in Afghanistan and the two Chechen wars. Many soldiers were being deployed to the Caucus region without notice; on top of that there were unreported deaths and kidnappings of Russian soldiers. In the state's stead, the CSMR stepped in to fill the void of access to information, providing information to concerned families when the authorities would be uncooperative.[14] Additionally, there were troubling reports from returning soldiers of terrible

8 Reuveny and Prakash, "The Afghan War and the Breakdown of the Soviet Union*"* 693-708.
9 Robert M. Cassidy, *Russia in Afghanistan and Chechnya: Military Strategic Culture and the Paradoxes of Asymetric Conflict*, (DIANE Publishing 2003,) 48-49.
10 Amy Caiazza, *Mothers and Soldiers: Gender, Citizenship and Civil Society in Contemporary Russia*, (Routledge, New York and London 2002.)
11 Phillipp Casula, "Between 'Ethnocide' and 'Genocide': Violence and Otherness in the Coverage of the Afghanistan and Chechnya Wars," *Nationalities Papers,* 43 (January 1, 2015): 700-718
12 Caiazza, *Mothers and Soldiers*
13 Caiazza, *Mothers and Soldiers*
14 Matloff, "Russia's Powerhouses of Dissent"

conditions for servicemen, including lack of food, slave labor conditions and lack of medical gear and proper clothing. Furthermore, several incidents came to light of a brutal tradition of hazing for new conscripts, called *dedovshina*, in some cases resulting in serious injury or death and met with complete impunity by the military authorities.[15] Branches of the CSMR popped up all around the country, from Altai to Moscow with different areas of concern and regional focus.[16] Growing throughout the early years of post-Soviet Russia, the group became increasingly anti-war, mounting large-scale protests, participating in hostage negotiations in the Chechen war zone, and advocating for military deserters.[17]

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo began as a group of women searching for disappeared loved ones in Argentina's capital, Buenos Aires, in the late 1970s, with their first official meeting in the Plaza de Mayo taking place on April 30, 1977.[18] Beginning after a military coup in 1976, a period of state imposed terrorism occurred in which an estimated 30,000 Argentinian people were tortured, imprisoned or "disappeared" by the state.[19] Also called the "Dirty war," the period of military rule in Argentina was a reaction to the Peronist guerilla fighters and the increasing perceived threat from leftwing activists.[20] Many of those who were targets of the military junta were activists, artists, trade union members, dissidents and

15 Anna U. Lowry, "Saving Private Sychev: Russian Masculinities, Army Hazing and Social Norms," *Berkley Journal of Sociology* 52 (2008): 73.
16 Eva Maria Hinterhuber, "Between Neotraditionalism and New Resistance- Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg," *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 19, 1 (2001): 139-152.
17 "The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia (CSMR,)" Laureates, The Right Livelihood Foundation, Accessed May 26, 2020, https://www.rightlivelihoodaward.org/laureates/the-committee-of-soldiers-
18 Diane Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War,"* (Duke University Press 1997.)
19 Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*
20 Gustavo Morello, review of *Argentina's Missing Bones: Revisiting the History of the Dirty War* by James P. Brennan, *University of California Press* 41, 1 (2020): 170-71

guerilla fighters; some, however, were targeted for no apparent reason.[21] In the face of brutal government sanctioned violence, this group of mothers had grassroots origins, meeting initially to share in their experience of grief. Additionally, the women were actively searching for kidnapped family members with hope that their sons and daughters would be returned to them.[22] The Madres always dawn white head scarves and march around the central square across from the presidential office building in Buenos Aires as an act of dramatic protest, touting photographs of their loved ones who were victims of human rights abuses.[23] Even after one of the founding members, Azucena Villaflor, was kidnapped and murdered by the government in 1977 as an act of retribution for her activism, the group continued to march in the Plaza de Mayo to publically demand justice.[24]

The group has become world-renowned for their human rights work and has sustained not only its many-faceted organizational work but also its weekly marches in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, which have been taking place on Thursday afternoons at 3:30 since the 1970s.[25] The work of the group has adapted and changed to the times, from providing psychological assistance to Argentinian survivors of the junta to discovering information about the location or fate of missing individuals, to provide information on democracy and rule of law in Argentina in front of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.[26] The group is conceived of as a major catalyst in bringing an end to the military

[21] Mark J. Osiel, "Constructing Subversions in Argentina's Dirty War," *Representations* 75, 1 (2001): 119
[22] Fernando J. Bosco, "The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Three Decades of Human Rights' Activism: Embeddedness, Emotions and Social Movements," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96, 2 (2006): 342-65.
[23] Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*
[24] Alicia Partnoy, "Textual Strategies to Resist Disappearance and the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo," *Comparative Literature and Culture* 9.1 (2007): <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1028
[25] Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*
[26] "La Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos recibío a las Madres [The Inter-American Court of Human Rights received the Mothers]," Novedades [News,] Asociaciôn Madres de Plaza de Mayo [The Association of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo] (May 22, 2019) http://madres.org/index.php/la-corte-interamericana-de-derechos-humanos-recibio-a-las-madres/

dictatorship, drawing international attention to human rights violations in Argentina and creating a singular vehicle for accountability after the fall of the military government.[27]

III. Public Memory

There is a great rhetorical debate around the definition of what constitutes public memory, especially as distinct from "public history" or "collective memory." For the purposes of this thesis, these cases will be analyzed in light of a definition put forward by Edward S. Casey in which he describes the fundamental trait of public memory as being linked not only to the past, but also to the present and the future of remembrance.[28] This distinguishes accounts of the past from "public history" in its temporal fluidity as well as from "collective memory" in its necessarily publicly expressed nature. Casey elaborates to explain that public memory takes many forms including printed eulogies and obituaries, monuments and the publication of missing or deceased people's names and photographs amongst many other forms. These expressions serve an important function for victims, as they move from an anonymous point of data (i.e. number of dead in a battle) to a public position, in order to "reclaim recognition or vindication[29]" for a victim. Therefore, the mere fact of being witnessed by a public, whatever sensory form that may take, bestows a larger importance on an individual memory. Public memory, in its link to past, present and future, eternalizes the experience of loss and trauma and brings it to the forum of public consciousness. Through creating fleeting moments or permanent representations of public memory, individual stories are re-experienced emotionally by the viewer in an engagement with the past, present and future periods of time.

[27] Partnoy, "Textual Strategies to Resist Disappearance and the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo."
[28] Edward S. Casey, "Public Memory in Place and Time," *Framing Public Memory* (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press 2004.)
[29] Casey, "Public Memory in Place and Time," 20

The role of public memory viewed through the lens of human rights advocacy is also distinctive, as it demonstrates a relationship between a public, a state and a group of individual victims. In this context, public memory is possibly best described by Graeme Simpson, who conceives of the bipartite nature of public memory containing two elements, "fact finding and quasi-judicial enterprise on the one hand, and as a psychologically sensitive mechanism for storytelling and healing on the other.[30]" Simpson's reflections are specifically to the case of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post-apartheid South Africa, but the analysis has a broader application to any practice of engaging with public memory in the wake of human rights violations. Utilizing Simpson's dual-purposed approach, the same two features of memory can be observed in the cases analyzed in this thesis. The process of memorialization can be seen as serving the purpose of fact finding and transparency, leading to justice and accountability from the authorities. Meanwhile, a more personal and psychological feature is certainly present in both cases, as relatives of lost loved ones use public memory to emotionally heal as a step of the grieving process. Furthermore, there is a great network-building capacity to the process of engaging with public memory, as ties between victims are embedded in the practices of public memory, allowing for organizing around common causes.

Finally, there is a legal foundation to the right to memory in international law. It is argued by some human rights thinkers that the right to collective memory underpins the right to full participation in society.[31] The right to freedom of expression, specifically, implies the right to full participation for all in the creation of public memory and public history. Particularly when it relates to the rights of victims of human rights abuses, the space for

[30] Graeme Simpson, "A Brief Evaluation of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Some Lessons for Societies in Transition," Working Paper, *The Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation,* (February 11, 1999): 19.

[31] Philip Lee and Pradip Ninan Thomas, "Introduction: Public media and the Right to Memory: Towards and Encounter with Justice" in *Public memory, Public Media and the Politics of Justice*, (Palgrave Macmillan 2012): 1-23

expression is crucial for reaching justice. Whether it take the form of memory laws that sanction historical falsifications[32] or the broader right to memory which functions to protect legal frameworks for full participation in collective memory, there is great value for societies in guaranteeing the right to memory. Lee and Thomas use the poignant example of truth commissions as mutually beneficial entities, both for justice for victims of human rights violations and for a larger societal reconciliation after internal conflict.[33] Lee and Thomas, however, take a somewhat reversed approach to the importance of memory; their argument hinges on the idea that the repression of historical truths, also called "historical amnesia" causes deep-rooted societal trauma. Though this may be true, the cases analyzed in this paper show that the relationship between the state, victims and information of public interest may function slightly differently; information being gathered and recorded, by victims or the state, leads to societal healing. It is not solely the repression of freedom of expression that hinders the societal and individual healing process; it is also access to information from the state that is equally important.

Access to information is incredibly significant in justice for victims, as exemplified by the use of information in bringing to light government abuses in both Argentina and Russia. This principle right has been elaborated upon by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the circumstances of forced disappearances in the case *Gudiel Álvarez et al v. Guatemala*. The ruling of the court specifically speaks to the right of the family member of a victim of forced disappearance to know the truth about their death and location of their remains. The court goes so far as to describe the withholding of this information for the family members of victims as "cruel and inhumane treatment for the closest family

[32] Ivan Hare and James Weinstein, *Extreme Speech and Democracy*, (Oxford Scholarship Online, May 2009) https://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199548781.001.0001/acprof-9780199548781-chapter-28. See for details on holocaust denial law in Germany.
[33] Lee and Thomas, *Introduction*, 1-23

members.[34]" The same traumatic effect can be conceived of for Russia family members of soldiers who are killed and not informed of the details of their death such as location, cause or the return of their remains for burial.

Though predating many of the seminal decisions by international courts and tribunals regarding state responsibility in the wake of mass violations of human rights, the two mothers movements in Argentina and Russia were pioneers in utilizing the central legal principles of access to information and freedom of expression as vehicles for justice. Notably, however, both Argentina and Russia have been signatories of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) since before both of the mothers' organizations' inceptions.[35] As noted in article 19 of the ICCPR, every person has the right to freedom of opinion, expression and access to information.[36] Although the international treaties had been in place predating the mothers' groups, both groups were most active in societies with burgeoning democracies; therefore the rights were very new and seized upon actively by the groups. In addition to utilizing these new rights, the mothers expanded them through active civil and political engagement.

Memorialization Projects: The Intersection of Grief and Justice

Serguei Alex Oushakine describes the CSMR's practices of memorialization as serving a function to help the mothers "materialize evidence of their loss and suffering." Moreover, it also serves to materialize evidence of the death of their sons in a state that was working to suppress the large losses of soldiers in the increasingly unpopular wars in

[34] *Gudiel Álvarez et al v. Guatemala*, Series 253, Inter-American Court of Human Rights, (Judgment of Novermber 20, 2012,) Paragraph 301.
[35] "Status of Treaties," Depositary, United Nations Treaty Collection, Accessed June 3, 2020. https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-4&chapter=4&clang=_en
[36] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, United Nations (1967.)

Afghanistan and later, Chechnya.[37] Oushakine's argument is premised on the mutual exclusivity of individual and localized grieving and larger societal reconciliation, and justice. The two practices, however, are interconnected and cannot be viewed as serving unique purposes. As noted by Simpson, there is a dual function in public memory which serves both individual and societal ends.[38] While it may be the sole desire of a community to grieve their local deaths, such as in the case of the Altai CSMR chapter, there is also a larger movement for societal change that binds together localities. In interviews conducted during Oushakine's fieldwork, the mothers expressed a distinct opposition to larger political motivations of the national CSMR; that said, their memorialization practices do unite them in terms of both justice-seeking and a national trauma. The memorialization projects provide not only emotional evidence for individual loss, but also permanent physical evidence that embodies a sense of justice, grounding memory as historical fact. For example, reburying a soldier from an unmarked grave to a centralized marked grave detailing his service and death provides both material evidence of loss and suffering for his family and evidence of his death in a particular military conflict.[39]

Both in Argentina and in Russia, the mothers groups took advantage of their local narratives and identities to unite under a national banner. It is precisely the intersection of localized grief and national crisis that contributed to the strength and longevity of the two movements, as their experiences were fundamentally relatable in a geographically widespread region, as evidenced by the large number of chapters spanning both countries.[40]

In Russia, the localized memorialization projects took a large variation of forms, including books containing obituaries of soldiers, "memory rooms," public memorials,

37 Caiazza, *Mothers and Soldiers*
38 Simpson, "A Brief Evaluation of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission"
39 Oushakine, "The Politics of Pity"
40 Caiazza, *Mothers and Soldiers,* 124. In Russia there were at the time up to 300 regional chapters. Bosco, "The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Three Decades of Human Rights' Activism In Argentina," Table 2 page 353. There were at least 21 permanent chapters of the Madres throughout Argentina.

theatrical performances of poetry and dance and dramatic public readings of obituaries.[41] The mothers frame their memorialization projects under a banner of free expression, linking their public acknowledgement of loss to a sense of community and shared experience. As Oushakine observes, "the sharing of loss and suffering helped convert personal pain into collectivized memory, which was in turn materialized as an arranged amalgam of objects, places, and rituals, as 'material sites of affective experience.[42]'" What Oushakine describes is a sort of emotional convergence between individual emotional pain and group pain, leading to a process of communal engagement with public memory. Furthermore, the mothers themselves acknowledge the importance of their rights to free expression as integral to their healing in interviews with Oushakine.

In the face of state sanctioned marginalization of victims, a reality in Argentina and Russia, both groups created a new "topography of death[43]" in centralized spaces, to geographically root their mourning in a public venue. In Russia, the soldier reburial projects were accompanied with permanent rituals.[44] In Argentina, the Madres collected in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires toting pictures and banners commemorating the disappeared. The fusing of emotional ties to physical locations has been fundamental to both movements, as the "topography of death" allowed a permanent link to exist between the fallibility of a memory and an immovable physical location, effectively grounding a fleeting and flexible experience in an enduring and constant physical symbol.

In alignment with the description of "public memory" as defined by Casey, the Altia regional CSMR projects epitomize the importance of non-linear time engagement with memory practices. As Oushakine describes the projects, he shows the way that engagement with public memory for these mothers was designed to reference the past, present and future.

41 Oushakine, "The Politics of Pity"
42 Oushakine, "The Politics of Pity," 300
43 Oushakine, "The Politics of Pity," 302
44 Oushakine, "The Politics of Pity"

Rituals accompanied the physical memorials set up by mothers, such as plaques and memorial statues. These rituals included marches in memoriam to happen annually, as well as the regular visitation of sights of memory, the lighting of candles on anniversaries and the upkeep of fresh flowers at gravesites.[45] These rituals serve to eternalize the engagement with loss through public memory, as each site is adjoined to a ritual that will continue on indefinitely, and that also harkens back to the past.

The same feature of ritual can be observed in Argentina, as the practice of gathering in the Plaza de Mayo has continued to date.[46] While the ritual of walking around the square no longer serves the original purpose of direct confrontation with the public and the state, it serves the purpose of public memory as it engages with the past through memories of lost sons and daughters, with the present through the observable meaning of a march given the current social, political or other context, and engagement with the future in that it is predictably and dependably going to occur on every future Thursday afternoon. Fernando Bosco also describes the ritualistic memorialization of members of the Madres who have died, spreading their ashes in the Plaza as a continued practice of memorializing their experiences and group bonds. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo also hold protests that are defined as memory protests. One example of this is the 24-hour march held in 1981 called "The return alive of the detained-disappeared (*Aparición con vida de los detenidos-desaparecidos.)*[47]*"* The march took place not only to commemorate the disappeared sons and daughters of the mothers, but also several mothers who were disappeared as a result of their

[45] Oushakine, "The Politics of Pity"
[46] "Categoría: Jueves en la Plaza [Category: Thursdays in the Plaza,]" Asociaciôn Madres de Plaza de Mayo [The Association of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo.] http://madres.org/index.php/category/jueves/ Information about the Thursday meeting is available at the Madres' website.
[47] Victoria Anna Goddard, "Demonstrating Resistance: Politics and Participation in the Marches of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo," *Focaal* 50, (2007): 85

political activity.[48] The active ritual of remembering is central to a sense of justice for victims in both cases, as forgetting them would represent and injustice in and of itself.

According to Bosco, the Madres have also benefited organizationally from the emotional aspects of remembering.[49] Through the resurrection of grief and sorrow felt by the group members, the ties between the women grow ever stronger and sustain geographically widespread networks because of these bonds. Bosco writes that the mothers utilize a practice of "remembering past emotions and their translation and mobilization of past and present emotions as a way to reinforce their social bonds.[50]" Furthermore, the practice of remembering has the effect of reminding the women of the passions they feel toward the cause of human rights. Returning to the feeling of sorrow, grief or bereavement refreshes motivation to work diligently on causes of human rights. Because of the ritualistic practices of weekly meetings, whether it be in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires or a booth at a Sunday market in another town, the Madres have sustained activism for decades.[51] Many of the most active members in the organization are elderly, yet they still feel impassioned by their rituals of gathering with other mothers.

The emotional ties, public memorials, published works and rituals practiced by both groups of mothers are very similar, proving that engagement with public memory in both cases is fundamental to the organizations' work in advocating for human rights. Although both groups participate in other forms of human rights advocacy, such as legal reform lobbying, engagement with public memory makes up a large portion of the overlapping features of the two organizations.

Search for Information About loved Ones: Fact Finding Missions

48 Goddard, "Demonstrating Resistance," 81-101
49 Bosco, "The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Three Decades of Human Rights' Activism"
50 Bosco, "The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Three Decades of Human Rights' Activism," 354
51 Bosco, "The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Three Decades of Human Rights' Activism"

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the CSMR have in common the origin of organic fact-finding attempts by formerly decentralized mothers. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo found their start in Buenos Aires, searching in government buildings and public offices for information about their disappeared loved ones.[52] Testimonials from the founding members report showing up day after day to police stations to locate their arrested sons and daughters, only to face ridicule and in some cases violence from the authorities.[53] The search and demand for information to combat state repression and indifference was fundamental to the Madres' mission and continues to be a part of their work as they struggle to unearth a decade's worth of truth through public documents, interviews with witnesses and survivors of the state terrorism, and any other evidentiary material that comes to light.[54] Because of the active efforts of the military dictatorship to destroy evidence and act explicitly through policies of secrecy, much of the evidence that contributes to a full picture of what occurred in the past relies on the memories of those who survived. Diana Taylor describes the strategy of the state to eliminate civil society and consolidate power as the military government's "struggle to establish a stabilized social consensus.[55]" The state did this through suppression of any alternative historical narrative, therefore effectively silencing the public sphere and any voice of individual memory or experience. It was not until 1983, six years into the establishment of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, that official revelations began of hundreds of clandestine detention centers, the existence of at least 250 children still missing and the estimated extent of the forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings by the military

[52] Bosco, "The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Three Decades of Human Rights' Activism"
[53] "Todos son mis Hijos - Película completa - Madres de Plaza de Mayo [The are all my Children- Full Movie- Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo,]" March 24, 2020, Associaciôn Madres de Plaza de Mayo [Association of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo,] 1:27:22. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QUmcswORJc
[54] Partnoy, "Textual Strategies to Resist Disappearance and the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo."
[55] Taylor, *Disappearing Acts,* 60

junta.[56]As a result of the long delay in exposing official truths, the process of accessing and expressing information as part of the Madres' work is necessarily through engagement with public memory. Many of the published materials that the mothers have released, including several novel and books of poetry, are heavily based on testimonials of survivors' experiences of the terror imposed on society by the military junta.[57] Alicia Partnoy argues that these texts served a strategic purpose, to document the existence of individuals that the government disappeared. For example, Partnoy describes a book of poetry in which each poem is preceded by the official information gathered from the ID cards of missing people, of whom the government had no record. By preserving this official information in artistic and literary material, the mothers were able to preserve relevant data that would later help to identify missing and murdered people.[58]

In Russia, the situation was not as clear-cut. Some women were meeting in their communities to find information about their conscripted sons who were fighting a far away war in Afghanistan.[59] Meanwhile, others were responding to information from their sons about terrible conditions in the military and violent hazing rituals. The military was very non-transparent and the group responded to this by fact-finding for the benefit of individual families as well as for the greater struggle to create military reform.[60] One of the group's leaders, Valentina Melinkova, describes the CSMR work as a sort of clearinghouse, where families of conscripted soldiers could bring grievances and the CSMR would act as an intermediary with the military to solve their problems.[61] In many cases, according to

[56] Mabel Bellucci, "Childless Motherhood: Interview with Nora Cortiñas, a Mother of the Plaza de Mayo, Argentina," *Reproductive Health Matters* 7, 13 (1999): 83-88
[57] Partnoy, "Textual Strategies to Resist Disappearance and the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo."
[58] Partnoy, "Textual Strategies to Resist Disappearance and the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo."
[59] Oushakine, "The Politics of Pity"
[60] Eva Bertrand, "Les Militaires ne Savent Plus Comment Travailler sans les Comités de meres de soldats [The Military do not Know how to Work Without the Soldiers' Mothers Committee Anymore]- Interview with Valentina Melinkova, Union Soldiers' Mothers Committee, Moscow, Russia, " *Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies* 9 (2009.)
[61] Bertrand, "Les Militaires ne Savent Plus Comment Travailler sans les Comités de meres de soldats [The Military do not Know how to Work Without the Soldiers' Mothers Committee Anymore]"

Melinkova, this would take the form of fact-finding for families, whether it be a question of the location of a soldier's deployment, access to records regarding service or death, or any other legal or administrative concern that a family member may have. Melinkova also acknowledges the regional branches and that they serve a somewhat different purpose, often springing up spontaneously from the central organization in cases where a community has suffered many military losses; however, they always collaborate in regard to resources with the central branches, to ensure fluid networks of communication related to military information.[62] In Russia, according to Caiazza, one of the biggest hurdles to information regarding military service is the corruption and superfluous bureaucratic hurdles in place to distance people from accessing the military systems, including access to information required by law. Because of these blocks in the channels of access to information, the CSMR act as a guide for those who are unable to navigate the system on their own.

The common reality of the necessity to find information, in both Argentina and Russia, shows that there is a strong organizational capacity resulting from the effort to utilize access to information rights. By creating networks to share information between formerly unaffiliated individuals in light of governmental withholding of facts, the mothers groups created activist networks. Furthermore, these networks are heavily tied up with public memory projects, as this was either the only vehicle for seeking historical truths or the public memory projects themselves were the catalyst for community organizing.

Fact Finding Develops into Justice-Seeking

[62] Bertrand, "Les Militaires ne Savent Plus Comment Travailler sans les Comités de meres de soldats [The Military do not Know how to Work Without the Soldiers' Mothers Committee Anymore]"

The progression of the fact-finding missions turned toward justice seeking initiatives in Russia as well as Argentina. With the introduction of more information entering into the public domain, each group undertook work to seek justice in various forms. For the CSMR, this took varied forms in their disparate branches. In the central branch in Moscow the mothers fought for widespread policy change of draft law to allow for internationally mandated alternative service options for military conscription.[63] In smaller localities it included seeking government funding for public memorials to properly honor soldiers who died during the Soviet era and were buried in mass graves or with anonymous headstones.[64] The group used the information that they received from local offices about military practices, cases of hazing and abuse and ill treatment by the military to lobby for change at the federal level in Moscow.[65] Additionally, Caiazza describes the group's weekly meeting to convene families of soldiers in order to provide legal aid and advice for conscripts' families.

In Argentina, fact-finding and justice-seeking were heavily intertwined, as creating evidence of the existence of disappeared people led to the opportunity to seek justice from the state. Nancy Gates-Madsen describes the work of the Madres as part of the "memory 'boom'[66]" in Argentina following the end of the military government. She describes the process by which the memorialization work of the mothers contributed to the legal prosecution of many perpetrators of the human rights abuses in the 1990s as well as prompting public apologies and an official truth commission. In the case of the Madres, fact-finding and memory were one in the same: as the clandestine manner in which people were disappeared, followed by official denials of the atrocities and amnesty laws perpetuated the burying of facts, the use of memory projects continued to insist on the existence of injustice.

63 Caiazza, *Mothers and Soldiers*
64 Oushakine, "The Politics of Pity"
65 Caiazza, *Mothers and Soldiers*
66Nancy J. Gates-Madsen, *Trauma, taboo, and Truth-Telling: Listening to Silences in Postdictatorship Argentina* (University of Wisconsin Press 2016): 144.

Without the witnesses and their participation in memory project facilitated by the Madres, evidence of crimes may have been lost forever.

Not only did the Madres de Plaza de Mayo participate in demands for justice after the trial and pardon of military officers in the 1990s, but the offshoot group, "Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo" began a campaign of locating a potential of 500 grandchildren who had been captured and re-homed by the military government.[67] The grandmothers used the same strategies as the original group by collecting information and tips from witnesses and survivors of the dictatorship to evidence the identities of missing children.[68]

Grief as an Organizing Principle

According to Fernando J. Bosco, many Argentinian women felt that despite the fact that they were from far-reaching localities and were not able to sustain ties physically, emotional ties were developed through a shared personal feeling of being a part of a larger network. The sense of identity as mothers, that is self-identifying as Madres de Plaza de Mayo, often came before official chapters were declared in localities. Bosco describes this phenomenon as "embedded ties," which sustained the movement through the period before formally organized chapters.[69] Bosco uses the analogy of a support group to describe the functions of the organization at the outset. Furthermore, Bosco explains that many mothers from around Argentina met each other in Buenos Aires through their work with the Madres, realizing that they were in fact from the same rural communities but had never formerly had

[67] Ari Edward Gandsman, "Retributive Justice, Public Intimacies and the Micropolitics of the Restitution of Kidnapped Children of the Disappeared in Argentina," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6 (3,) (November 2012,):423–443.
[68] Gandsman, "Retributive Justice, Public Intimacies and the Micropolitics of the Restitution of Kidnapped Children of the Disappeared in Argentina"
[69] Bosco, "The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Three Decades of Human Rights' Activism"

the opportunity to share their grief without the facilitation of the unifying organization. Through the centralized group, new local branches were born and sustained for decades.

This is similarly true of the women organizing in Russia. The feeling of shared loss and the ability to connect and communicate with others who had experienced similar losses had a healing effect. In letters studied by Seguei Oushakine, provided to him by the Altai Museum of Local Wars, mothers whose sons served together write to one another from different cities. The emotional ties expressed in the letters exemplify the bonds shared between them despite the fact that the women were not related by anything other than their loss. As one woman in Omsk writes to her fellow mother in Altai, "[your son] Kostia is forever alive in our family and he lives together with our own son. In the evening, I put them asleep, all my sons, and in the morning I wake them up and live through the whole day, remembering them.[70]" It is clear that the woman writing the letter considers her grief as part of a larger community and has fostered a long-standing connection to a virtual stranger because of this emotional tie.

Another theory put forward for the strength of network-building in both cases relates to research on "emotion cultures.[71]" Taylor and Rupp coin this term to describe the "emotional labor" exchanged between members of activist organizations and the sustained bonds that this has proved to create. By bearing a loss not just an individual, but as a representation of large-scale human loss, the mothers bear the emotional burden of each other's losses, creating emotional networks that span large geographical areas and lifetimes. Both in Argentina and in Russia, the mothers speak of their work in terms of "all of the children" that suffered their child's fate.[72] The two cases exemplify the existence of "emotional cultures" as the women explicitly bear the burden of their collective loss.

[70] Oushakine, "The Politics of Pity"
[71] Vera Taylor and Leila I. Rupp "Loving Internationalism: The Emotion Culture of Transnational Women's Organizations, 1888- 1945," *Mobilization* (2002*)* 7 (2): 141-58.
[72] Bellucci, "Childless Motherhood." See for information regarding Argentina.

IV. Psychology of Trauma: Mother's Groups as a vehicle for Healing

Collective memory, individual memory and public history in societies which have experienced human rights catastrophes or large-scale societal upheaval resulting in violence, must be viewed through the lens of psychology, in particular, trauma. Jeffery Prager aptly described the link between these experiences, writing, "Trauma is a memory illness.[73]" He describes the psychology of trauma as an internalized experience of past events lived through the present. When approaching the process of healing, both individually and societally from trauma, Prager notes that it must be a combination of internal and externalized experiences that overcome the common traumatic experience of the fragmentation of personal identity that strikes victims. This can apply to both an individualized practice of psychotherapy, or a public policy that seeks to address widespread trauma. It is also applicable to the practices of civil society groups such as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the CSMR. Although not falling into the category of state-sanctioned public policy like a truth and reconciliation commission, the two groups function as vessels for therapeutic processes for the members of the community in each respective situation. This section will delve into the psychological approach to traumatic healing and the role of memorialization in that process. Furthermore, it will show the role of the two groups of mothers in this process and how they act as vessels for communal healing for the victims and society as a whole.

A common effect of trauma, according to Jeffery Prager, amongst other researchers, is one of alienation from one's own experience and a sense of "the breakdown of a person's natural sense of his or her own self-importance.[74]" Therefore, the way to heal is to allow a

Oushakine, "The Politics of Pity." See for information regarding Russia.

[73] Jefferey Prager, "Healing from History: Psychoanalytic Considerations on Traumatic Pasts and Social Repair," *European Journal of Social Theory*, 11(3), (2008): 409.

[74] Prager, "Healing from History"

patient to personally connect to the events that caused the trauma in order to process them effectively. Prager describes the end goal as an achievement of a "healthy self-centeredness.[75]" This is done through the individual's personal recollection of their experience related to trauma, meaning that a state-imposed narrative of the event will not do anything to heal the victim if it is not recollected by the individual directly. In other words, the victim of trauma should place themselves in the center of their own story, expressing their experience as personally as possible without interference.

This process is visible in the practices of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo as well as the CSMR. In Argentina, the women took agency in their own narratives in several ways. First, the mothers who came to the Plaza de Mayo carried with them photographs of their lost loved ones, sharing their stories publically, where there was formerly no public recognition of the existence of the person preceding their accounts. Furthermore, the women felt empowered by their experiences sharing their memories with one another. As Bosco describes, "The Madres felt empowered by realizing they were not alone and that together they were able to act in ways they had never acted before.[76]" The sense of empowerment described by the mothers, who had formerly described symptoms of depression and apathy[77], was the progression of healing from trauma through the therapeutic experience of ownership of individual memory and experience.

Furthermore, the communal aspect of grieving is paramount to healing from trauma on a large scale. Edelman and Kersner recommend a process of group communication to cope with traumatic experiences, writing, "During this process new discourses are

[75] Prager, "Healing from History," 410
[76] Bosco, "The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Three Decades of Human Rights' Activism," 351
[77] Bosco, "The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Three Decades of Human Rights' Activism"

collectively construed and elaborated as from the said shared actions, giving a new meaning to things and, also, defining another principle of reality for the work of bereavement.[78]"

Furthermore, there must be a community of grieving to allow for healing and preventing a victim from feeling alienated by the lack of understanding by society. The testimonies of mothers from Argentina outline the damaging feeling of alienation, with one stating, "We stayed together because we were desperate and we were the only ones who understood what was happening to us.[79]" It is further stated by Edelman and Kersner that the community of healing should include both victims and perpetrators in order to critically approach the divergence in perspectives. There must be a creation of a space for freedom of expression and access to information on both sides. This relationship is described by a Russian mother and member of CSMR who participated in this engagement through publishing a book containing painful memory objects connected to her loss such as pictures and mementos, saying, "I would come to officials to introduce myself and I would show them portraits from the album, so that they could have a look, and I could see their reaction.[80]" She goes on to explain the emotional healing that this process led to as she was surprised by the helpfulness and empathy that she witnessed from state officials who were indirectly responsible for her loss.

There are different categories of trauma, and the trauma of state-imposed violence in the form of forced disappearances in Argentina is certainly quite different from the Russian case of military action, death and injury as a result of obligatory military service. Both, however, fit into the category of *organized violence,* as described by Sveaass and Levik.[81]

78 Lucila Edelmen, Daniel Kersner, Diana Kordon, and Darío Lagos, "Psychological Effects and Treatment of Mass Trauma Due to Sociopolitical Events: The Argentine Experience," in *The Psychological Impact of War Trauma on Civilians: An International Perspective* ,Edited by Stanley Krippner and Teresa M. McIntyre, *Psychological Dimensions to War and Peace,* (Westport Connecticut: praeger Publishing/ Greenwood Publishing 2003)

79 Bosco, "The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Three Decades of Human Rights' Activism," 350

80 Oushakine, "The Politics of Pity"

81 Nora Sveaass and Nils Johan Lavik, "Psychological aspects of human rights violations: The importance of justice and reconciliation," *Nordic Journal of International Law*, 69(1), (2000): 35-52.

This category is distinct for human rights violations, as they differ in the healing process from, for example, accidental deaths. Furthermore, there is one more step removed from the trauma in the case of the mothers of the direct victims. However, according to researchers, trauma from war or other human rights violations can be transferred to family members and even passed down intergenerationally.[82]

Another aspect that exacerbates trauma is impunity following an instance of organized violence. Researchers Sveaass and Levik describe this finding, writing, "When amnesty is granted and impunity stated as a principle, there is no public attempt at repair and this limits the social room for grief, sorrow and mourning.[83]" Feelings of worsened psychological isolation can occur in situations with full impunity or official denial of human rights violations. It is, therefore, healing for groups including the mothers to find a sense of community and link this to seeking justice as the route to healing, societally and individually.

In Russia, the mothers of the CMSR exemplified a psychological effect of trauma when met with impunity, "taking the law into their own hands[84]" through acts including physically removing their sons from military service in Chechnya and elsewhere.[85] This vigilante justice-seeking is unique, and not always possible for groups such as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. However, the Madres pursued justice in other ways, such as through acts of civil disobedience and public protest of impunity.[86]

Sveaass and Levik note that there is inherent importance with regard to the public nature of truth disclosures. For one, third parties or the public as witnesses create certainty about historical truths, allowing for healing and justice. Furthermore, the public disclosure of truth about human rights violations are in themselves a certain sense of justice, as the

82 Ellinor Fraenkl Major, *War Stress in a Transgenerational Perspective, 1993*, Department Group of Psychiatry, (University of Oslo 1996.)
83 Sveaass, Lavik, "Psychological aspects of human rights violations," 43
84 Sveaass, Lavik, "Psychological aspects of human rights violations," 43
85 Caiazza, *Mothers and Soldiers*
86 Partnoy, "Textual Strategies to Resist Disappearance and the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo"

victim's story is not subject to doubt. Finally, there is a psychological burden lifted from victims and transferred onto the society as whole when trauma is dealt with on a societal level.

The organizing principle behind the two groups of mothers is linked to the healing aspect of shared trauma. If individuals are bearing their grief and trauma on their own, believing that their strife cannot be understood by others who did not experience the same trauma, there can be a detrimental pause to the psychological healing of a victim. This is exemplified in the research of Yael Danieli, who describes the "conspiracy of silence" which takes hold of victims who are not engaged with others who have suffered similar traumas.[87] For this reason, the coming together of groups of mothers in both Argentina and Russia offered the first step to psychological healing by providing individual victims and mourners with communities who shared their experiences and could degrade the prevalent post-traumatic feeling of isolation, weakness and social disenfranchisement.

V. Gender as a Factor in Mothers' Movements

When considering gender as a factor in the development of the two civil society groups analyzed in this thesis, each case study has its own unique context. Although patriarchal societal structures are global, gender, in these cases, is particularly linked to political space and nationally specific norms. There is, however, a deeper commonality than simply gender, between the two groups analyzed in this thesis. Motherhood as a principle feature of political activism includes additional societal implications beyond simply gender. Amy Caiazza analyzes the worldwide success of groups that utilize motherhood for political

[87] Yael Danieli. "Massive Trauma and the Healing Role of Reparative Justice", in C. Ferstman, M. Goetz & A. Stephens (eds), *Reparations for Victims of Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity: Systems in Place and Systems in the Making, Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff* (2009): 41-78.

reasons, explaining that the use of "female consciousness" is an extremely effective organizing principle. More specifically, a group embracing the gender consciousness associated with motherhood can make broad arguments for the protections of the nation's children, not just their own. This approach has proven to be successful not only in Russia and Argentina, but also in Ireland, Israel, Palestine and the United States.[88] Caiazza argues that the use of motherhood as a key identifier brings greater legitimacy in societies with traditional values. This section will explore the use of politicized motherhood in the development of both organizations.

In Russia, during the most active years of the CSMR, scholars have described the gendered strategies that the group used with the term "neotraditionalism.[89]" Amy Caiazza describes the gender-centered strategy that the group consciously employed, whereby the members embraced gender stereotypes and used them to their benefit. In interviews with organization heads, the group makes specific mention of their moral responsibility as mothers to protect their sons in the face of a failing state, saying, "We have biological laws *obligating* us to act when people are in danger.[90]" They also deployed this moral argument to shield themselves from condemnation. As Judith Matloff writes, the mothers possessed "an aura of impunity that only the sanctity of motherhood could provide.[91]" Furthermore, their daily operations in working to reform military policy necessarily meant working almost exclusively with male opposition. The group describes strategies for negotiation with military officials which included playing "roles" that fit neatly into gender stereotypical boxes such as "the caring mother" and "the spoiled daughter.[92]" The women also physically embodied a traditional picture of motherhood, wearing traditional headscarves and clothing to depict the

88 Caiazza, "Mothers and Soldiers," 116
89 Hinterhuber, "Between Neotraditionalism and New Reistence- Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg"
90 Hinterhuber, "Between Neotraditionalism and New Reistence- Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg," 126
91 Matloff, "Russia's Powerhouses of Dissent"
92 Caiazza, "Mothers and Soldiers," 127

typical trope of a Russian mother. Caiazza describes the "performance" of vulnerability and grief in media appearances, partnering with Chechen mothers to advocate for an end to the war. In this way, the women were successful in subverting attention away from the actually radical activism that they were catalyzing.

The neotraditoinalist approach to human rights activism in Russia must be understood in the very specific context of gender roles as they relate to civic engagement. Based on the strongly gender-centered ideologies of the Soviet Union that carried over into the 21st century, there was a societal perception of civic duty divided between gendered lines. One the one hand, women were expected to participate in their civic responsibilities through engagement with the private sphere, child rearing and moral teacher to future citizens. On the other hand, men were expected to express their citizenship through military service. Caiazza explains that these two gender roles were fundamental to Soviet society, but after the fall of the Soviet Union, and the increase in drafting of young soldiers in the early years of post-Soviet Russia, the CSMR mobilized their gender role to re-shape the societal ideas of support for military draft. In doing so, they deployed the traditional female gender roles against the state and against the typified male gender role, overriding the principle of mandatory military service using the moral authority of motherhood.

In Argentina, the role of women was heavily relegated to the private, domestic sphere prior to the actions of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. While on the one hand embracing some features of societal expectations of motherhood, the group also added to and transformed it, politicizing it in a way that had never before been seen in Argentinian society. Mabel Bellucci describes this transformation as coming from the changing of their own identities as "childless mothers" following the state sanctioned kidnapping, torture and murder of their children.[93]

[93] Bellucci, "Childless Motherhood"

In an interview with Nora Cortiñas, a founding member of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, she explains the way that motherhood played a political role in their activism. Cortiñas makes a distinction between the beliefs of feminist groups at the time and the Madres, stating, "It was hard for many of us to see how motherhood could be a patriarchal idea. You have to understand that our identity as a movement was based on that traditional role.[94]" In describing the politicization of motherhood, Cortiñas tracks the beginning of the movement as a sense of maternal duty to protect one's children and as a result of the mass scale of human rights violations, the children of every mother in the country. Because of the fact that no men participated in the original activism, Cortiñas describes a strong discomfort felt by the state authorities who were caught off guard by the unprecedented actions of the women. This is a similar discomfort that the CSMR representatives described in their interactions with male authority figures.[95]

The common element of gender and motherhood in both Russian and Argentina is that the use of motherhood as a moral trump card allowed women to step out of the private sphere and into the political limelight. By embracing the traditional role of women as caretakers of children, the women were empowered to make radical political change in their countries.

VI. Conclusion

The Committee of Soldier's Mothers of Russia and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo present evidence of deep engagement with public memory as means to reach individual and broader societal healing after large scale organized violence. Through practices of

94 Bellucci, "Childless Motherhood"
95 Caiazza, "Mothers and Soldiers,"

memorialization and ritual, both groups participated in collection of evidentiary material leading to justice-seeking initiatives. While the path for justice in each case necessarily took on disparate forms due to the nature of each trauma and the national political context, both groups advocated for human rights in their official capacities as civil society organizations. Each group also provided for societal healing through the collection and publication of information of great public interest, leading to a more democratic public sphere.

Furthermore, such practices of memorialization and ritual played therapeutic roles in the lives of individuals and communities who underwent trauma due to man-made conflict. In each case, there was an additional feature of network-building through shared experience of loss, leading to geographically widespread organizational chapters participating in efforts for national policy change.

The practices and work of the two organizations served a larger societal purpose of progress in both cases. By demonstrating loss, and finding therapeutic ways to overcome societal trauma, both groups mainstreamed their experiences, brining a public acknowledgement of violence and grief. Not only was the government responsive to some demands of the mothers, but also both groups were also responsible for changing societal ideas about the issues that they were addressing in their work.

In Argentina, the acknowledgements and public attention blossomed into official recognitions of state imposed violence and triggered remedies such as criminal prosecution for perpetrators of violence, official public works projects commemorating the violence and a truth commission.[96] In Russia, the CSMR was largely responsible for catalyzing a national anti-war movement, reforming draft law and bringing accountability to military officials who had perpetrated human rights violations against soldiers.[97]

[96] Gates-Madsen, *Trauma, taboo, and Truth-Telling*
[97] Caiazza, "Mothers and Soldiers,"

Motherhood made both groups distinct from other organizations advocating for human rights in both countries. The shared experience of gendered parenthood contributed to a moral high ground that was palatable for society as a whole in both countries. Motherhood also provided a sense of identity that bonded the members of the respective groups together in a shared social contract of advocacy for all of their sons and daughters. Finally, the moral responsibility of mothers to protect children, according to gender norms in both countries, drove their actions with emotional intensity.

Further research should continue to explore the gendered elements of the human rights work that the two organizations undertook. Certain important questions still exist, such as what psychological aspects of motherhood catalyze political action? In both cases there is an obvious void in human rights advocacy: male participation. Future research should seek to explain the reasons for this gendered participation disparity.

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