



POLITICAL FAMILY: KINSHIP AND CONSANGUINITY IN HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS IN ARGENTINA.*

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims to analyze the modes of social and discursive construction of political and blood kinship in the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo (AMPM hereinafter). Tools from the anthropology of kinship and family studies are used to examine how family ties are configured and the role given to biological ties in this constitution.

In addition, the relationship between kinship and human rights in post-dictatorship Argentina are researched and how this model has influenced the notion of family in the realm of human rights organizations. The focus is particularly on AMPM from its formation in 1979, until the 2000s to reflect on the meaning of political motherhood and the socialization of motherhood. The analysis is based on three sources: The minutes of formation of the Association on August 25, 1979; an interview with Hebe de Bonafini in which she explains the origin of the socialization of motherhood, and the speech given by the president of the organization on the occasion of the 19th March of Resistance held on December 31, 1999 to welcome the new millennium.

The goal is to understand the existence of generational and political legacies in the familiarity within human rights organizations.

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In order to carry out this analysis, the case of H.I.J.O.S (Hijos e hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia, contra el Olvido y el Silencio) and Nietes organizations were taken up, analyzing how the ideas of AMPM and the context of emergence of each organization influence their adaptation to the current situation.

KEY WORDS: kinship - family - Mothers of Plaza de Mayo - generation

FAMILIA POLÍTICA: PARENTESCO Y CONSANGUINIDAD EN LAS ORGANIZACIONES DE DERECHOS HUMANOS EN ARGENTINA.

ABSTRACT: Este trabajo se propone analizar los modos de construcción social y discursiva del parentesco político y consanguíneo en la Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo (AMPM en adelante). Se utilizan herramientas de la antropología del parentesco y de los estudios de familia para examinar cómo se configuran los vínculos familiares y el papel que se le otorga a los vínculos biológicos en esta constitución. Además, se investiga la relación entre parentesco y derechos humanos en la Argentina post-dictadura y cómo este modelo ha influido en la noción de familia en el ámbito de las organizaciones de derechos humanos. Se focaliza particularmente en la AMPM desde su formación en 1979, hasta la década del 2000 para reflexionar sobre el significado de la maternidad política y la socialización de la maternidad. El análisis se basa en tres fuentes: El acta de constitución de la Asociación el 25 de agosto de 1979; una entrevista a Hebe de Bonafini en la que explica el origen de la socialización de la maternidad, y el discurso pronunciado por la presidenta de la organización con motivo de la XIX Marcha de la Resistencia celebrada el 31 de diciembre de 1999 para dar la bienvenida al nuevo milenio. El objetivo es comprender la existencia de legados generacionales y políticos en la familiaridad dentro de las organizaciones de derechos humanos. Para llevar a cabo este análisis, se tomó el caso de las organizaciones H.I.J.O.S (Hijos e hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia, contra el Olvido y el Silencio) y Nietes, analizando cómo las ideas de AMPM y el contexto de surgimiento de cada organización influyen en su adaptación a los nuevos tiempos.

KEY WORDS: parentesco - familia - Madres de Plaza de Mayo - generación

Introduction

The aim of this study is to examine how family ties, both political and biological, are constructed and expressed in human rights organizations in Argentina, and especially in the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo (AMPM). The study starts from the lack of scientific analysis that link human rights organizations and their connection with family and biological kinship and the rupture established by the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (Madres hereinafter). This analysis is supported on approaches provided by sociology, anthropology of kinship and family studies, gender studies and historical studies on the family in Argentina, which make it possible to understand how these links are established and understood, as well as the meanings given to biology in this dynamic.

In addition, the interaction between the notion of familiarity and the principles of human rights in post-dictatorship Argentina is explored as well as how this paradigm has shaped the perception of what constitutes a family within organizations dedicated to the defense of human rights. The focus is primarily on AMPM from its creation until the 2000s in order to reflect on the meaning of motherhood in the political sphere and how this idea is socialized. This analysis of AMPM is based on the work of primary sources produced by AMPM.

The purpose is to highlight the presence of generational and political influences in the construction of the notion of familiarity within human rights organizations and of motherhood in particular in the case of Madres. To do so, the case of the human rights organizations H.I.J.O.S and Nietes are taken as a reference, analyzing how the ideas promoted by AMPM and the historical context of the emergence of each organization has influenced their adaptation and development.

To this end, this work is organized as follows: the bibliographical background that allows to conceptualize kinship, family and consanguinity is presented in the first part, and then the focus is on the anthropological debate regarding the social and/or biological linkage of families. Looking for the presence of biology in the family narratives of the organisms and AMPM in particular, the question of substance as a structure of the biological in order to reflect on the role assigned to blood - as an emblem of family inheritance - in the antecedents is addressed. In the second part, the focus is on the organized family response to the dictatorship and the role played by family organizations during this period. In particular, the case of AMPM and the conformation of two universals that strain the established stereotype of familiarity, political motherhood and the socialization of motherhood, are analyzed. This analysis is approached from a historical perspective. To do so, three primary sources that allow understanding and analyzing the discourse of the organization at three representative historical moments were selected: the founding of the association in 1979, the process of shaping the meaning of the socialization of motherhood in the mid-1980s, and the turn of the century discourse in the 1999 Resistance March. Finally, the legacy this imprint of AMPM left on the new generations of family members and human rights organizations, particularly in the cases of H.I.J.O.S and Nietes, will be analyzed.

Kinship, family and consanguinity: Some background

Studies on kinship are the basis of anthropological research, seeking to analyze, understand and research the modes of social connection and reproduction. In this line, the main contributions regarding the definitions of kinship are taken up here with the aim of understanding the historical relationship between the biological and structuring role that kinship acquires in human rights organizations in post-dictatorship Argentina.

According to Geertz, the primordial links are those that arise from the facts that are embedded as given in social existence “immediate contiguity and kinship connections mainly, but also the given facts that supposed to have been born in a particular religious community, speaking a certain language [...] These equalities of blood, speech, habits, etc. are experienced as ineffable, vigorous and binding links in themselves” (1997, 222). Thus, the relationship is given an absolute and inexplicable importance. Links appear to be due more to a sense of natural affinity than to social interaction, and such links acquire an inherently binding character. These particularities of the link as oscillation or complementarity between the natural and the social have been the subject of numerous studies.

The family: biological or social bond?

Much of the literature on the anthropology of kinship discusses the centrality or non-centrality of blood ties in family relationships and the social role of this tie and its structural consequences in society. What place does the biological factor have in family ties? How are these ties constructed? What is constructed with this familiarity? As argued by Cecilia Johnson (Schneider in Johnson, 2019: 78, “Schneider pointed out that, associating kinship with the natural and biological, is a bias of anthropologists who take for granted the conceptions of their own culture to understand kinship in others”

As for the constructions and meanings of family organization, the contributions of Pierre Bourdieu, in his text *The Spirit of the Family* are highlighted. In it, he states that “According to the dominant definition, the family is a group of related individuals, linked to each other by alliance, marriage, or filiation, or more exceptionally by adoption (kinship) and who all live under the same roof (cohabitation)” (1997: 131). On the contrary, for the author, the family is a social construction and he maintains that, “The family construction is one of the constitutive elements of our *habitus*. A mental structure that, having been instilled in all socialized minds, is both individual and collective” (129).

From the difference between the social and the biological, Bourdieu (1997) gives weight to the social relationship by saying that the family, as an objective social category (structuring structure), is the foundation of the family as a subjective social category (structured structure), at the same time that it becomes a “realized social fiction” (131). In this way, then, it is a “social artifact” (135) an illusion that, when

produced and reproduced with the guarantee of the State, as maintained by Bourdieu, receives from the State at every moment the material means to exist, subsist and reproduce itself.

In a similar sense, Cepeda (2005) understands that the family is a social construction. It is a historical category that reproduces disciplining logics on how the family structure should be, function and be reproduced. Thus, the author warns that family members are not mere representations of a pre-existing family history, but rather function, in a Foucauldian reading, as “strategies” of “social control” or “disciplining” in which the family reproduces power relations of society and, in turn, imprints representations within the domestic space.

On this point, this author places family narratives in a leading role for the reproduction of the family institution, since these narratives of the family past allow problematizing three issues:

“On the one hand, the meanings, processes and power relations implicit in the construction of the family spirit. On the other hand, the forms that the transmission of the family and institutional past takes. Finally how a story whose space is family privacy necessarily articulates narratives of the family past (in relation to State terrorism) with narratives of political history where the singularity of the family experience is transformed into the political experience of a collective” (Cepeda: 2005, 10).

This *structured structure* is supported, in turn, by a relationality that is affirmed in blood relations. What does it imply that kinship is organized in blood ties? What organizational logics does it entail? Although the discussion is present in the texts, the socio-cultural role of family ties is evident.

In this sense, Villalta and Tiscornia state that:

“(...) anthropological studies have not only shown that kinship is an essentially social fact, but also that the different functions which overlap and are concatenated in our societies, in many other societies are dissociated and combined in different ways” (2014:79).

Thus, these authors explain that, for current anthropologists, the relationship based on “blood” are elements that participate in the cultural construction of links, not only biogenetic, but also social. In this conjunction between biology and society, Smietniansky and Di Fabio Rocca (2022) understand that the social fact based on natural processes forms a hybrid concept of social and biological factors that imports a theory about the relationships between both domains. That is to say, consanguinity is present, but the organization, representation and meaning of the family is social, historical and situated and rests on a blood legacy. As Jimena Massa (2023:6) assures, what is under discussion “is the place of the biological and its relationship with the

other dimensions of kinship". Within this particularity, blood as substance acquires material and symbolic relevance.

Substance and corporeality in the family

The expression of substance is used following the proposal of Janet Carsten (2011: 2014). That is, understanding it as that bodily substance that is at the same time biomedical resource, diagnostic tool, or "as an extraordinarily powerful metaphor with a great capacity to flow between different social domains. Blood seems to be a paradoxical kind of object" (2014: 109). This paradoxical kind of object, is also understood by its capacity for blood plasticity (Johnson 2019:81), which gives the possibility to think of it as link, inheritance, descent, but also as truthfulness, proof and evidence of kinship.

What is the presence of biological substance in the political discourse of human rights organizations? What are the attributions assigned to blood? How do these languages and family records come together? Smietniansky and Di Fabio Rocca (2022) explain that in the anthropology of kinship the genetic data has relevant value:

"In the construction and representation of the scheme of stories, memories, traditions and family identities of the person under study, so that in this second scenario also comes into play the articulation between the order of the natural -genes and blood- and what would be included in the field of culture as well as what has been constructed" (40-41).

In parallel, Johnson (2020) states that kinship, as a cultural process, implies, as Butler (2002) refers, certain intelligibility. That is to say, for a family to be read as such, certain characteristics are expected to be met. The purpose is to analyze how this political family of human rights organizations is built, and how they shaped their relational connectivity between their *familism* (Jelin, 2010) and politics. In this regard, Fonseca (2018) analysis of time, DNA and kinship can be used, by retaking the proposal of the aforementioned Carsten (2007) to point out that:

"Anthropological analysis of kinship has focused on the lived experiences of family relations and has systematically elided the political dimension of that experience. On the other hand, some analysts interested in political issues demonstrate the interrelationships between memory and context - in reference, for example, to the violence of repressive regimes - but leave aside the question of kinship and family relationships" (Fonseca 2018: 156)

This sociocultural and historical construction of the family allows making more complex the union only by blood biology and also to think about narratives and memories that generate and reproduce these relationships. In this sense, the term connectivity coined by Carsten (2000) is used. From this term, the author proposes to think about the link by focusing on experiences, emotions, memories and all dimensions of life experience that build and mean relationships. In this sense, Jimena

Massa delves deeper into connectivity and explains that new forms of family can be established by “making kinship mediated by substances such as emotions, memories, political processes” (2023:3).

Carsten (2014) warns that one has to pay attention to the temporality in kinship in order to question how it is possible to imagine relationships that endure over time and distance. This also implies thinking about the place of material things in the materiality of being (Carsten, 2014). This warning is useful to think about the familism reproduced by human rights organizations. Thus, it can be seen that in the post-dictatorship period there emerges the political vindication to be children of parents whom, in many cases, they did not know and of being *grandchildren* of grandparents who disappeared or were murdered by State terrorism thus, becoming part of a family of organizations, in a *structured structure*, inhabiting its narratives, memories and logics.

Cecilia Sosa (2012), takes up, from gender studies, the proposal of Judith Butler who analyzes and describes these non-normative forms of kinship¹ as those that “do not fit the nuclear family model and are based on biological and non-biological relationships that function according to non-formalizable norms, surpassing the scope of current legal conceptions” (Butler, 2005: 102 cited in Sosa 2012). Thus, Butler makes an invitation to understand kinship “as a set of diverse practices of different nature, which negotiate the reproduction of life and the demands of death” (Butler, 2005: 102-103). That is, as varied practices that arise to address fundamental forms of human dependency. With respect to modes of kinship, it is important to keep in mind that the analysis of Judith Butler of *performance studies* is that the structure can be understood while it is being exercised. That is, modes of family reproduction can be seen while they are being exercised.

This approach, that makes it possible to understand that *one is a family* when *one becomes one*, allows analyzing the position of various human rights organizations in the post-dictatorship period in Argentina. The role of AMPM, and H.I.J.O.S and Nietes organizations have been selected for this analysis. In the three cases, the purpose is to analyze how the family and political ties with the disappeared (mother-child; son-father; grandson-grandfather) are narrated and to historicize the construction of this political family that makes up these organizations.

Family and human rights organizations. Argentine family studies

From a historical approach to family studies, it can be noted that they were initially part of the private history of social sectors. In particular, in the case of studies on the Argentine family, they can be organized chronologically. The text by Cicerchia (1990) regarding the colonial period, which addresses family life and conjugal practices between 1800 and 1810 in Río de la Plata stands out. Then the analysis compiled by Devoto and Madero (1999) which describes the period from 1870 to 1930 can be found. In their *history of private life in Argentina*, divided into

¹ Regarding non-heteronormative families Cfr. Weston, K. (2003), Johnson (2020).

three volumes, this compilation starts from the Braudelian premise of the study of an object in its long duration to reach a complete understanding that differentiates the event from the context, reinforcing the historical and social understanding of the family as the private level of the community. Losada (2021) analyzes a period covered by the work of Devoto and Madero, but problematizes its reading based on the understanding of the family practices of the Buenos Aires high bourgeoisie, in what he calls *Bella Epoque*, 1880-1920. This complexity is part of the reading that the family represents, rituals, practices and ways of being of the elite and of reproducing lifestyles and *habitus*.

The studies that link the role of families with gender roles within the family institution, giving prominence to women, are found next. The text by Nari (2004) focuses on the analysis of the modes of motherhood in Buenos Aires society at the end of the 19th century. This work understands the complexity of society as the material basis for its object of study, and also analyzes what she calls the “mothering of women”. In other words, the process of medical and cultural assimilation of women and mothers, to conclude with the process of politicization of motherhood and feminism. This is a work in feminist key to understand the historical development of families. The text of Barrancos (2012) *Familia/familias* is in line with the work of Nari (2004). In it, the historian discusses the existence of an exclusive type of family. On the contrary, she proposes an understanding of the coexistence of different types of families.

The period of the Peronist governments (1945-1955) marked a turning point in the history of Argentina and of families in particular. The focus on the family and the expansion of the rights of children shaped and intervened in family coexistence and the way families were. On this period, the work of Cosse (2006) analyzes and problematizes the role of the typical family in Peronist propaganda and how the stigma of origin of those children who were children of extramarital relationships are addressed.

In relation to the role of families in the sixties, in a climate of social and revolutionary turmoil, appears the text by Cosse (2010) on couples, sexuality and families in the seventies and their daily implications. In addition, in a recent publication (2021), this author, together with her research group on Argentine families and childhood, analyzes the socio-historical changes that transformed these structures in contemporary history.

The dictatorship period of 1976-1983 must be seen as a disruptive milestone for two reasons. First, because it is evident that it is during this period that the break-up of the families of the disappeared takes place, from which the human rights organizations that will be analyzed later will emerge. But the second is because, discursively, the self-proclaimed dictatorship, the National Reorganization Process, has put the family at the center of the discourse (Bravo, 2003). Arguing for the recovery of Western and Christian values, state terrorism referred to the family as the primary nucleus responsible for preventing young people from joining subversion. As for the approach to the family, it can be briefly divided into two areas: one in

schools and the second, in the mass media, pretending that these two operate on the functioning of the family itself.

In relation to the image and discourse that prevailed about families at school, the text by Carolina Kaufmann (2007), which analyzes the approaches to “the family” in school textbooks for the subjects Moral and Civic Education is of relevance. These teaching materials were recommended and used in secondary schools during the years of the last Argentine military dictatorship (1976-1983). This work highlights the roles that were stipulated to the duties of husbands, wives and children in the manuals of compulsory use in schools and thus establishes a *de facto* school-government alliance to shape an ideal, heteronormative, patriarchal and obedient type of family.

Editorial articles on the “value of the family”, on how “subversion attacks the family institution” and on the effect of active surveillance by parents over their children to prevent them from being absorbed by the guerrillas, were highlighted in the media,

Following Osuna’s approach: “The state agents of the last dictatorship used organic and biological metaphors in their discourses. In this sense, according to government diagnoses, “subversion” was perceived as a virus or a disease that had infected the “social body” as a whole, including its most microscopic “tissues”. The family was represented as “the basic cell of the community”, its minimum and indissoluble unit in the formation of that “social body” (2019: 12).

Of course, this idiosyncratic model was accompanied by adherence to the Catholic apostolic religion and its family values, reinforcing the role of “natural” mandate, where the man-father represented authority while the woman-mother was to love, ensuring the safeguarding and transmission of tradition (Osuna, 2019).

This insistence on the family work by dictators allows thinking that the response to the disappearances was given by family members themselves. It is understood that the familiarization of the discourse adopted by the human rights organizations is based on the circulating discourse of the dictatorship, but it overflows and politicizes it.

Family response to the dictatorship and the role of organizations in the post-dictatorship period

The history of human rights organizations in Argentina has already been described and analyzed in a large bibliography (Alonso 2008; 2021, Barros 2008, D’Antonio 2007, Franco 2018, Gorini 2017 [2006], Jelin 2017, Laino Sanchis 2023, Morales and Quintana 2022, among others)². Adhering to the existing accounts, one can return to the classical division that generally differentiates those affected/unaffected to change it according to the composition of members that form the

² Zubillaga (2016) warns that due to the multiplicity of modes of action that human rights organizations have carried out, it is worth asking if it talks about the human rights movement in the singular or plural (Alonso, 2014) and to discuss categories or concepts such as local history and region (Aguila, 2015; Kotler, 2014).

group and their condition in relation to the missing person who remains in the division as relatives or non-relatives. The group of relatives is formed by AMPM and its subsequent division to the founding line (Línea Fundadora) Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo), Relatives of missing detainees and political prisoners (Familiares de detenidos desaparecidos y presos políticos), and, in democracy, H.I.J.O.S. and Nietes organizations are added.

The group of non-family members is composed of the already existing League for Human Rights (formed in 1938 and then called League for the Rights of Man), the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights, the Center for Legal and Social Studies, the Peace and Justice Service, the Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights and later on, they would be joined by Historical Memory and Good Memory (Memoria Histórica and Buena Memoria). It is important to begin here by making the clarification that the division is fundamentally enshrined in the brand of origin of the foundation of the organization. This does not mean that in these “non-family” organizations there were no direct relatives of people who had been arrested and disappeared. Rather, it means that the imprint and the position they take with respect to the complaints are not the role of family members but of a humanitarian civil role.

This academic account that can be called classic (Alonso, 2015) “defined the groups that should be considered part of the human rights movement and made it impossible to think of organizations other than those included in the list of ‘the eight human rights organizations’, as part of that movement” (Zubillaga 2016: 225), thus, generating a habitability in the field of human rights and a correct way to conform it.

The focus will then be on the political response that the family figure embodied in the face of State terrorism. Filc (1997) warns that as a result of the changes in the family structure produced by the dictatorship, there is an oppression of the intimate and private space, combining elements of the private and the public. As it has been described, the message that the dictatorship had on the family made it an observed, guarded and monitored institution, causing a friction between the private and the public (Cosse, 2021). This tension was made evident by the actions of human rights organizations of families who questioned the whereabouts of their relatives, from the point of view of consanguinity. As Virginia Vecchioli suggests, by assuming a demand for justice based on blood, successive democratic governments transferred a family-based narrative to the entire nation (Vecchioli, 2005). It ended up creating a false equation between the universal abstraction of human rights and the particular situation of those “directly affected”.

At the time of the encounter, recognition and organization, “the primordial links functioned as the closest and most reliable cultural references to organize, the most effective for communicating and then defining themselves as a group” (Da Silva 2000: 290). These links that promoted the irrevocable denunciation and the group encounter, made them the reference of trust for other people in the same situation.

The dictatorship began on March 24, 1976 and on April 30, 1977 the first Mothers’ march was officially held. This event, which became an icon, began as a response to the police order to “move around, move around”. Thus, they began to

walk in pairs around the Pyramid of May and inaugurated the most relevant and lasting political and performative event of our recent history (Busquet 1984, Gorini 2017 [2006]). In this first organization there were mothers looking for their children, and also grandmothers looking for their grandchildren. Subsequently, the process of individual organization would begin, on August 25, 1979, and the act of creation of AMPM, held in the city of La Plata, would be signed. For their part, Grandmothers would take their own path in the restitution of their grandchildren (Laino Sanchis, 2020; Quintana, 2022).

In relation to the role that these “family” organizations have acquired, Virginia Vecchioli (2005) explains that the strength of these relationships of familiarity does not automatically derive from the nature of the blood link, but rather from the particular way in which the ‘relatives’ of the victims of State terrorism have acquired social existence in the framework of a series of political, judicial and symbolic struggles sustained over more than 30 years within the Argentine nation. Below, the discourse of the AMPM is analyzed, with the objective of interpreting how consanguinity, motherhood, inheritance and family are represented in three political discourses of this organization.

Mothers of Plaza de Mayo Association: from individual search to socialization of motherhood

As has already been mentioned, Mothers of Plaza de Mayo started at the same time of the disappearance of their daughters and sons, a journey through different governmental and military institutions to find the whereabouts of the disappeared. Overtime, they have been meeting and recognizing each other in different places. The pioneer in collectivizing the claim has been Azucena Villaflor de Devinenti. According to the testimony of Mothers³, Azucena is univocally placed as the one who decided to take the step of making the complaint public. As mentioned before, the first march of the Mothers Association took place on April 30, 1977, and from then on, and on a weekly and uninterrupted basis, they have carried out until today, this act of denouncing the disappearance of their daughters and sons⁴. In December of the same year, Azucena together with Teresa Careaga and María Ponce, were disappeared from the Church of the Holy Cross, located in the Federal Capital. The formation of the AMPM determined representations, statutory and hierarchical organization within the organization as well as a declaration of principles.

Three sources will be used to analyze this organization. The minutes of conformation of the Association on August 8, 1979; an interview with Hebe de Bonafini where she explains the origin of the socialization of motherhood; and the speech given by the president of the organization, on the occasion of the 19th March of Resistance held on December 31, 1999 to welcome the new millennium. The minutes are a relevant source for this analysis because they are the first public

³ Documentary *Madres de Plaza de Mayo: The Story* (Mignogna, 2016).

⁴ For the history of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, see Bousquet (1987), Gorini (2006; 2007), Zarranz (2020).

notarial appearance, in which they express themselves, stablish themselves and argue as Mothers, making it possible to understand the position they assume at their foundation and in view of their future prospects.

The socialization of motherhood, as it was called by Mothers when they collectively recognized themselves as Mothers of all the disappeared, is one of the distinctive characteristics of this organization. It can be said that it meant a political-performative turn by which Mothers stopped speaking in singular for the son or daughter of each one and began to speak, claim and defend *all children*. This practice, as such, does not have an exact start date. However, for this research, the interview made by Graciela Di Marco (2007) to Hebe de Bonafini is considered because it is the first dated document in which the progressiveness of this statement is explained.

Finally, the speech at the end of the century was chosen as a reflection of the need to transfer the struggle for human rights to new generations. This speech, delivered at midnight at the beginning of the new century, becomes an inevitable source in this regard. The guidelines that allow understanding how Mothers position themselves, how they represent the bond with their children and how the maternal role is politicized will be looked for in these bases.

Origins of the Association and political motherhood:

The minutes introduce the 20 women founders of the Association and establish the organization of the board of directors, composed by 11 of them: a president (Hebe Pastor de Bonafini), a vice-president (María Adela Gard de Antokoletz), a secretary (María del Rosario América Caballeda de Cerruti), a deputy secretary (María Eugenia Casinelli), a treasurer (Juana Meller), a deputy treasurer (Nora Irma Morales de Cortiñas) and five members (Carmen Aguiar de Lapacó, Rofia Stopolsky de Epelbaum; Angélica Sosa; Beatriz Haydeé Aicardi de Neuhard and Élica Bussi Galletti); Rofia Stopolsky de Epelbaum; Angélica Sosa; Beatriz Haydeé Aicardi de Neuhard and Élica Bussi Galletti). This way, the founding committee and the board of directors establish their roles and functions through the bylaws.

In the statement of principles presented in the 1979 minutes, Mothers maintain that:

"We are mothers of missing detainees and we represent many thousands of Argentine women in the same situation. We are not motivated by any political objective. No one has summoned us, or encouraged us, or used us as instruments. We are against violence and against any kind of terrorism, private or state. We want peace, fraternity and justice. We long for Argentina to have a democratic system, respectful of the fundamental rights of the human person. Believers or not, we adhere to the principles of Judeo-Christian morality (...) We do not judge our detained and disappeared children. We do not even ask for their freedom. We only demand to be told where they are, what they are accused of and that they be judged according to legal norms and with the legitimate right to defense, if it is considered that they have committed a crime. That they

should not be tortured. That they are kept in decent conditions, so that we can see them and assist them. *Can there be a simpler, more elementary, more correct, more humane, more Christian claim?* We know that there are many thousands of Argentine households in the same situation. For this reason, we have decided to unite and form an association that will bear the name of Madres de Plaza de Mayo, in memory of the event and the place that brought us together for the first time. As we have said, our first objective is to obtain an answer to our anguish from the, civilian, military and judicial authorities of the country: Where are our children? What has become of them? To this end, we will take all the steps, acts and publications that we consider appropriate, respecting the laws and public order” (Minutes August 25, 1979, underlined).

The first mention of themselves is highlighted in this fragment: they are mothers of the disappeared and represent thousands of women in the same condition. They thus show two effects: the vindication of their motherhood as an individual fact, but also as a collective fact when representing others. And that the claim is always plural “where are *our* children” (emphasis added). Likewise, we see that statement of Mothers does not question the idea of a Christian family, but rather relies on the circulating discourse of the dictatorship that made it possible to use a mode of narration to be used as a possible discourse to be narrated.

In their proclamation, they distance themselves from political interests and motivations and approach the family (Filc 1997) and Christian morality - expressions typical of the dictatorial lexicon - and, from there they also construct themselves as social actors that cannot be censured, since they speak with the permitted words, but demand justice. Thus, the filial bond becomes the very explanation of the claim. In the enabled or available family message, in which -as it has been developed- the responsibility of mothers and fathers to keep their children within the *status quo* was total, it allowed relatives to be a valid and novel voice in the claim. This “family guild” as a socio-political organization was inaugural. The gender issue also stands out (Di Marco 2007). Mothers have been underestimated as women and housewives in their political role and they used this to their advantage, they made of it a discursive capital audible to society and a socially shared value. In this sense, the rhetorical question of the declaration of principles: “Can there be a simpler, more elementary, more correct, more human, more Christian plea?”

Socialization of motherhood: We are Mothers of the 30,000

Likewise, in relation to the reason for the choice of the name, in the quoted fragment they state that it is “(...) as a reminder of the event and the place that brought us together for the first time”. In this regard, it can be seen, once again, an official speech omitting the politicization that took place for the meeting held in Plaza de Mayo. As the time of resistance of Mothers has gone by, some slogans and demands have been outlined. Such is the case of what they have called the *socialization of motherhood*. In Hebe’s words, this meant that

We socialized motherhood at a very, very hard political time, when we were accused of being mothers of terrorists and terrorist mothers. And in the face of such a strong accusation, all Mothers were very afraid. Then, a journalist would come and ask her, and she would say: “My son did nothing”, “They took him for his friend”, “They took him for his wife”, “They took him because of his cousin”. And so one day we started, we got together and talked a lot with other comrades, and we said that what we had to do was to socialize motherhood and become mothers for everyone. Then, no mother would be able to say: “My son did nothing” (Di Marco, 2007).

We see that, in the words of the president of AMPM, this perspective of motherhood was strongly linked to the context of the accusation and the mantle of suspicion of “they must have done something”⁵. Thus, this response was comprehensive and forceful: *we are mothers of the 30,000*⁶

Mothers of the guerrillas, mothers of the revolutionaries, mothers of the night of the pencils, of the Pallottines, of the literacy workers, of the teachers, of everyone. We took the name of the child out of the scarf and we no longer carry the picture with the name. All steps, with time, the Mother needed. So that when they come to ask the Mother, she says: “Yes, we are mothers of 30,000” (Di Marco, 2007).

This is a category specific of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo: it implies the action of recognizing all the disappeared as their children. This is understood as political-performative, since from public gestures the role of the mothers was strengthened and the individuality of the child was erased, ending the possible discussion about partisan and guerrilla politics. Regarding how to implement it, she says: “I started with this idea so that Mother would realize that socializing motherhood is an impressive, multiplier and loving fact. The first idea was for each one to carry the banner of another child” (Ibid.) In this interview, Bonafini recounts this action as a first way of carrying out the “they are all my children”. The practice of carrying banners with photos and names of the disappeared was a widespread mode of protest by relatives. Nora Sanchez (2005) explains that “This maternal socialization was not the same in 1977 than in 1980 or 1983. In 1980 socialization is “almost” absolute within the group” (73). To continue the expression of Sanchez it can be pointed out that, in 1986, when the initial nucleus of Mothers dissolved, there was a reformulation of two organizations and a repositioning in relation to it: Mothers of Plaza de Mayo Association (AMPM), and Mothers of Plaza de Mayo Founding Line (MPMLF).

⁵ The phrase “something must have been done” was popularized as a justification that the disappearance of people by State terrorism was a consequence of certain acts that subverted the established status quo. In this regard, Cfr. Bermudez (2015).

⁶ This statement refers to the number of people detained and disappeared as a result of State terrorism carried out in Argentina between 1974 and 1983. The vindication of the figure is an emblem of human rights organizations. Regarding the conformation of the figure 30,000 Cfr. Feierstein (2018:59).

As for the rupture of the biological mother-child identification, a novel structure is presented. This socialization of motherhood, as Mothers called it, maintains that all are their children, and that -at least publicly- the biological filial link⁷ that gave rise to the movement should not be tightened, but overcome. Is this a reformulation of the family, and does this rupture represent the creation of a new family, the political one? From their strictly filial origin, Mothers have been able to create creative and innovative slogans and proposals that allow complexifying families and, in particular, post-dictatorship families. Thus, for example, they affirmed that they had been given birth by their children. What does this affirmation mean? That a mother is given birth by her child is in itself an oxymoron. However, it can be intuited that it refers to the fact that they as an organism, as a political group of women, have been shaped by the very absence of their children. They are the absent but convening core. But this statement invites to problematize at least two more perspectives. First, the AMPM decides to take the convictions they consider proper to the ideology of their children, to continue them and to fight for them. Thus, for example, they incorporate into their lexicon and practices actions that they justify as belonging to their children. The second perspective is that of generational disruption: by being born from their own offspring, the very chain of legacy is modified. They inherit the convictions of their children and are committed to fight for them.

It can be considered that the socialization of this motherhood began with the desire to homogenize all children and militant contexts of each to generate an egalitarian defense of all. Something that could quickly be thought of as depoliticization. However, this process was accompanied by discourses that vindicate the militant commitment of the children and their role as revolutionaries. Thus, all are children of Mothers and all are revolutionaries. Gorini (2017b) points out how Mothers of Plaza de Mayo construct the figure of the children from the figure of the disappeared, and then that of the revolutionaries. In this regard, Vargas Moran (2016) points out that, at first, Mothers "(...) constituted a mirror image of the one offered by the dictatorship, where the language and the image of family occupied a central place, which was appropriated by the "Argentine Mothers" from the beginning of their actions and claims" (56) to progressively, as it was pointed out above, incorporate into their narrative and actions, expressions and ideologies of their children.

Following Saletti Cuesta (2008) in her theoretical reconstruction of feminist studies on motherhood, she argues that "The ability to give birth is biological, the need to make it a primary role for women is cultural" (175). In the case of the construction of motherhood of Mothers, this statement can be completed by saying that the strategy of creating social bonds between mothers and children, is political. The theoretical contributions on motherhood and feminism can be used to point out

⁷ It is interesting to think of this political process that starts from a biological bond as the opposite of the "uterization of the bond" proposed by Viera Cherro (2015), which in the words of Cecilia Johnson "the uterization of the bond refers to the emphasis given by reproductive medicine to the gestation and nurturing process in the maternal womb for filial bonding" (Johnson 2019:86). Here it can be seen that what they choose to highlight, is not the uterine/biological/blood relationship between these mothers with their respective children, but the construction of this political kinship between Mothers (with a capital letters) and the revolutionary children.

that this socialization proposed by the AMPM takes up the idea of motherhood as an experience (Rich, 1976). At the same time, it allows thinking of it as a dual and ambivalent space (Kristeva cited in Saletti Cuesta 2008: 179) and its implementation as maternal work (Ruddick, 2002), which, for this organization, is to carry out the ideas of their children.

End of the century and new calls

In the framework of the 19th resistance⁸ march called by AMPM for December 31, 1999 at midnight, the speech of the president of the Association took place. Hebe de Bonafini's speech was about the farewell of the year and in particular about the welcome of the year, the century and the new millennium, pointing to the generational change.

The call read "Let's start 2000 in Plaza de Mayo" and the slogan was "Live fighting injustice"⁹. With 22 years of history behind, and with 13 years of the division of Mothers and the political radicalization of AMPM, the speech of the President, given at the event, contemplates the political accumulation of this trajectory and the projections.

At the end of 1999, when this speech was delivered, the country was going through the Alianza government under the presidency of Fernando De la Rúa. The country was immersed in a deep social and economic crisis as a result of the neoliberalism installed by the civil-military dictatorship and the convertibility of Menem: unemployment, poverty, hunger and inequality were the common denominator of this crisis. The pardons granted to the military officers convicted in 1985 produced a climate of impunity that generated a social and media coexistence between victims and repressors. In this context, AMPM called for the 19th resistance march to take place between 8.30 p.m. on December 31 and midnight on January 1, 2000, and this speech was part of it. A brief speech, but with a strong content.

She begins her speech with a loving tone, addressing her children, seeking a possible dialogue with them, in which she tells them memories of the feeling of carrying them in her body and watching them grow, exacerbating the maternal feeling, to conclude "Children are not only from the belly, they are almost all from the heart", so the socialization of motherhood is located within the biological space, they are not children of the belly (uterus), they are children of the heart. To continue around maternal:

"How much we love you! How much we love you! We are reaching twelve o'clock, the last minutes of this year, the first minutes of next year. Dear children, with you, with your dreams, with your hopes, we are building on the pyramid, the first monument to freedom, because you have given your lives for justice and freedom."

⁸ The resistance marches are a practice of political resistance implemented by Mothers and consist of staying 24 hours in Plaza de Mayo, marching. The first one took place in 1981.

⁹ <https://www.archivosenuso.org/viewer/1572>

It is clear how a discourse initially constructed on a private, maternal-feminine and intimate level, gradually turns into a political, revolutionary one, adopting some masculinizing features.

This plaza, children, was born for the revolution. And the revolution is made every day, it is made every hour, not all the minutes in our life will be enough to give ourselves away. The inheritance is very strong, the responsibility that these dear children left us is very heavy. It is too strong, we cannot let them throw it away, nor sell ourselves, nor forget them, nor negotiate with them, nor reconcile ourselves.

In addition, as it was pointed out above, these children are presented as decidedly revolutionary, and they are presented as the recipients of this inheritance, within the framework of the aforementioned generational change. In addition to this change of direction of the hereditary transmission line, it was found that there is a strong generational transmission content in this discourse. The message of Bonafini was addressed to the young people present at the march. These young people are called by AMPM to continue the political legacy of their children, to take their places in the revolution. She would say “It is you, children. We want to transfuse and transfer to you the beautiful and warm blood that our children taught us to shed generously so that we can all live in freedom”.

In this powerful affirmation, the substance of blood is met again: the blood of the disappeared must be transfused to the young people. This transfusion would involve, on the one hand, loading them with the very substance of the ideals of the disappeared. But it would also include them in the legacy of the family of Mothers, since in the trilogy children-Mothers-young people, they would share the blood and thus become part of the same biological-revolutionary genealogy. On the other hand, in the aforementioned phrase, the generosity of giving one’s blood for freedom is mentioned. This places the children within a revolutionary lineage, in which surrendering is the will of children and not an outburst of terrorism. It vindicates the children as revolutionaries who, as martyrs, gave their blood for others.

Based on what was mentioned above regarding the socialization of motherhood, Hebe de Bonafini stated in this speech:

“(...) we have the immense fortune of having given birth to 30 thousand beautiful, strong and brave children. For which we do not need multinationals. We need *balls* to continue giving birth to other children that you are, we need you, we love you and you are necessary not only for us, but also for your children” (emphasis added).

So, it is evident that they position themselves as Mothers of the thirty thousand, but that what is needed are *balls to continue giving birth to other children*. This is one of the expressions that evidences the climate of the time and allows understanding this discourse within the political discourses of the time and the ways of speaking in

the public space at the end of the twentieth century. This very expression does not indicate a denial of feminine roles by AMPM but rather political euphemisms to refer to courage and bravery as masculine genitalia. However, it is ironic that Mothers affirm that, in order to give birth to children, one needs *balls*. It confirms that they do not deny the feminine role, as they insist on giving women a predominant role in the revolution, “[we] are increasingly certain that, even if we are a hundred years old, women have the obligation to give birth all the time, the spaces, the children, the ideas and the revolutions”.

This forceful statement dialogues with *duty of being* a mother and redefines it. It does not discuss the role of woman-mother, but it also adds the political burden of being able to create revolutions, ideas and spaces. This speech from 1999, is loaded with the political tradition of this organization, but also -like all speeches- with the context of production. It is considered as necessary to highlight that both AMPM and MPMLF have actively participated in 2018 and 2019 in the debates in favor of the voluntary interruption of pregnancy¹⁰, straining the false possible tensions between being Mother and maintaining the desire not to be one.

Finally, the legacy. The relationship established between the ideas of children, the ideas of AMPM and the call to young people has already been mentioned. In the following lines, the proposal is to evaluate the response they have had to this call to the heirs.

Inheritances in H.I.J.O.S. and Nietes:

The notions of continuity and lineage, of tradition and inheritance permeate the reading of the family. Thinking about the family institution forces to think in three times: in the past (attributes, customs and goods that belonged to others and that by blood or union came to the present generation), as well as in the present in which the ties are structured and in the future in which the following generations will receive what has been achieved and will make it their own.

This inheritance or legacy can be biological -which is frequently used as a univocal synonym of family and evokes resemblance, blood descent and the genetic load present in the ties- (Johnson, 2019), it can be patrimonial, or it can be intangible. Traditions, habits, manners, character and customs are understood as intangible heritage.

How is this reflected in the familism of human rights organizations? As evidenced from the sources discussed in the following point, in the statement of the president of AMPM, a social subject, heir to the political struggle, is named and sought. In the speech of December 31, 1999, it is evident that youth, as a new

¹⁰ In light of the rejection in senators, on August 9, 2018, at the Thursday march, Hebe de Bonafini (then president of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo Association) said: “the white and green scarf will be tied in a single march and we will achieve what the children have asked for so much”. Years before, Hebe had said “Mothers have always been in favor of life, it cannot be otherwise. That is why we are defending this project, to defend the lives of those poor women who die for no reason”. Regarding this change, see. Morales (2012).

generation is the basis of this legacy. Although in her speech she does not claim a genealogy that links the heirs to State terrorism, the proposal is to read the emergence of the H.I.J.O.S. and Nietes groups as a successor line of this organization.

In 1994, *Hijos e hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia, contra el Olvido y el Silencio* (H.I.J.O.S.) (Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice, against Oblivion and Silence) was created, a group that is characterized by its involving in the field of human rights (Cueto Rúa, 2008) with a renovating and youthful approach. They became known through the *escrache*¹¹ technique, through which the home address or workplace of a person who had been directly involved in repression was marked. They established their institutional organization horizontally and on the basis of regional organizations that allow autonomy and federalization in day-to-day decisions.

The context of the emergence of H.I.J.O.S. coexists with the climate of Menemism that was referred to above, and approaches the 20th anniversary of the beginning of the coup d'état. The experiences of AMPM and H.I.J.O.S build experiences of subaltern memory with respect to the strong or hegemonic memory imposed by the State through its laws and expressions (Colosimo 2014). Like AMPM acronym, the filiality of the members is the axis of the organization. They are daughters and sons and are called H.I.J.O.S. In October 1995, the First National Meeting of H.I.J.O.S (Cinto 2021) was held, in which they established the basic guidelines for their constitution. Cinto, expresses that in the experience of the conformation of H.I.J.O.S., the Rosario branch joined together with expressions that give the possibility to understand that this organization follows the same line of political family which is found in statements such as:

“However, though “We are all children of the same history” and “the dictatorship gave birth to us all”, the translation of intra-organizational links into the language of kinship occurs. The family, in the extension of kinship terminology, functions as a metaphor that contains the members of the political group (Filc, 1997; Comas, 2003), whether or not they have specific blood relations. Under this consideration it is possible to understand the expression “brothers/sisters of struggle”, used by the militants of the Rosario region to refer to each other” (2021: 45).

On the other hand, Cueto Rúa refers to the experience of La Plata branch, and its political discursive construction based on “We were born from their struggle, they live in ours” (2008:149). Through this sentence, there is a similar twist to that given by Mothers when they say that they were born from their children. Again the generational change: missing parents who live in the actions of their children. The aforementioned clarification of making explicit their birth within the struggle of their parents, provokes, as with AMPM a politicization of their parents and them as continuators of this struggle. Virginia Vecchioli argues that the public claim of the

¹¹ Taylor (2006); Quintana (2016), performative practices of the AMPM can be seen in Bruzzone and Longoni (2008).

bond of the relatives is not acquired exclusively by the fact of blood relationship with the victim of State terrorism but from an active practice of militancy in the cause of human rights. Then, this struggle that H.I.J.O.S. raises is shaped as a ritual of familiarity. It can be thought of as the *duty to be* of the relatives of the disappeared.

The ways of being relatives of disappeared detainees in Argentine politics have had a combination of family and political action. In this sense, “the relationship between genetics, kinship and identity substances is strongly marked by the trajectories and actions of human rights organizations in the face of crimes committed by the military dictatorship of 1976-1983”, as stated by Smietniansky Di Fabio Rocca (2022). Thus, Vecchioli (2005) explains that the effectiveness of this position lies precisely in the naturalization of the blood link and therefore, of the interests of those who militate in the human rights organizations integrated by relatives of the victims, interests that are presented as a moral imperative, that is, as belonging to a space that transcends political-partisan disputes.

On December 9, 2021, at the end of the day of democracy and human rights, Nietes made the first public intervention through the social network Instagram. In their enunciation, they said of themselves:

“We are the grandchildren of the 30,400 disappeared. We are their blood, their struggle and their dreams transmitted from generation to generation. We are the concrete reality that we have not been defeated and that is why today, we continue to organize behind their flags, those of mothers and grandmothers. We feel part of the living history of Our Latin America, we are born from it, that is why we also raise the more than 500 years of resistance of the indigenous peoples, the dreams of liberation of Latin America, the resistance of Juana Azurduy, the Resistance of the working class against the gorilla coup of 55, the Cuban revolution, the Cordobazo, the shootings of Trelew, the children of Malvinas, the Nicaraguan revolution, the resistance to neoliberalism in the 90's, the Argentinazo, the Puente Pueyredon, Darío Santillán and Maximiliano Kosteki, the anti-imperialist struggle, dignity and the open doors of politics to youth, the common prison for hundreds of genocides, the rejection of the 2X1, the fight for justice before the disappearance of Julio Lopez and Santiago Maldonado, all our children and grandchildren recovered “ (Nietes 2023).

Nietes crosses national political boundaries, is part of a Latin Americanist narrative and adopts a particular historical and political revisionism. First, in addition to the family link, it incorporates inclusive language in its name, updating the gender dispute in the defense of human rights. In addition, and in line with the of the AMPM premise, they position themselves as the Nietes de todos los desaparecidos (grandchildren of all the disappeared). They could say, “todes son mis abueles” (they are all my grandparents). It incorporates into its narrative a great silence in official

memory, sexual and gender diversities: in its figure of 30,400 it recovers the complaint made by the LGTBQ+ collective for being included and differentiated from the victims of State terrorism.

Furthermore, in this foundational text they place themselves following the flag of Grandmothers and Mothers, the successive sequence passes through the undisputed bastions of the human rights field and are incorporated in the national and regional claims. They claim to be part of the milestones of the popular and workers' resistance of the 60s and 70s and of the anti-imperialist and anti-denialist struggle that arose during Macri's government.

Nietes followed the lines of action of Mothers and H.I.J.O.S. and reproduced the scheme of regional headquarters in provinces where there were branches of the other organizations. There are branches of Nietes in Mendoza, Santa Fe, Rosario, Córdoba, La Plata/Berisso/Ensenada and CABA/Gran Buenos Aires. In these facts, it is possible to see the generational continuity of this political family between Madres, H.I.J.O.S. and Nietes that have inherited a scheme and model of political organization, have assimilated it and overcome it in each case with the particularities of the situation. Between these three organizations it is possible to see a hereditary hip that happens with the paradox that exists between Mothers-H.I.J.O.S.-Nietes: a whole generation is absent, that of the disappeared who unite and call for this family struggle.

Thus, both AMPM, H.I.J.O.S. and Nietes, organize their family relationship with the disappeared based on familiarity. They are organized into regional groups and a political continuity of the La Plata regional of HIJOS (Cueto Rúa, 2009) in relation to AMPM can be traced. As Guido (2022) points out, the relationship in the late 1990s between H.I.J.O.S. and Hebe Pastor de Bonafini has been close and politically aligned. Similarly, this political relationship of family and regional heritage can be found in a Nietes of the La Plata regional group that in the documentary *En el mismo río*¹² (2023) explains that:

"We cannot be only those who have a biological blood link, also the ones to carry out the *socialization of the struggle*, as Hebe taught us, we must also be able to look at those human rights, as well as to tell the rights violated today in a more comprehensive way and think about memory and recent history with the whole generation to think about the role of youth in Argentina and what remains for us" (emphasis added).

Likewise, it can also be confirmed that Nietes brings the novelty of gender in familiarity in line with the debates for inclusive language and the right to recognition and to gender identity. These young people use inclusive language in their public verbal and written language, (Colosimo 2024), with the use of the letter as "e" as a linguistic alternative and political dispute over the masculine generic. In this way, Nietes, places us in a family legacy that is updated in the production of new

¹² *En el mismo río*: Hoy son les nietes quienes son continuas la lucha, is a co-production between Nietes, Proyecto Raíz and Sudamericana cultura. It was produced and premiered in 2023.

generations at the same time that its decidability (Pollak and Heinich 2006) and dialogues with new presents are restored, but with legacies common to the *structured structure* of political familism.

Conclusions

Throughout this work, a bibliographical background of studies on family, kinship and consanguinity have been developed. This survey has been carried out with the aim of understanding the family as a social construction based on filial relationships that shape them. In this sense, this work focuses on the role of families in Argentine studies, considering their passage from the private to the public sphere. In relation to the public sphere, the role that the dictatorship gave to families as reproducers of the repressive scheme, and the family response produced by the relatives of detained-disappeared persons were analyzed.

In this particular analysis, the focus is on the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo. This organization emerged during the dictatorship and redefined its motherhood as a political and socializable practice. From its positioning, along the possible terms of enunciation between the dictatorship and the post-dictatorship, it became evident that motherhood, for this organization, began to be expressed within the frameworks of what could be said as biological, and with the social opening it became political.

In addition, with the emergence of new generations of relatives and their own organizations, there is a clear line of continuity with the one initiated by AMPM. Thus, the structured structure that was organized in terms of how to be a human rights organization of relatives of people detained and disappeared by State terrorism, reproduces a discourse that functions as a legacy in the new generations of H.I.J.O.S. and Nietes, which in each case took up the insignia of Madres of the Madres and grandchildren who, in each case, took up the insignia Mothers and continued them as a legacy, which in each case intervened in their particular context with claims and expressions specific to their situation, building a performative effect that generates social practices which reproduce ways and narratives of being a family in post-dictatorship Argentina.

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