

## **Maternal Protest:**

### **Opposition, Performance, and Alliance**

Motherhood functions as an imagined moral location from which both state and dissenting political groups have legitimated violence and political change. In the past 30 years, numerous groups around the world mobilized around their motherhood roles in order to resist authoritarian regimes. Such women organized primarily around their identity as mothers rather than as women, nationals or human rights activists. I contend that their significance lies in not only their efforts for human rights, but in the ways in which they reappropriate cultural symbols and, in some cases, join together to influence national politics. Maternal protests have a powerful and irresistible effect they demonstrate just how tenuous the respect, honor, and protection afforded to women who embrace the nation's ideology of motherhood is.

### **What is maternal protest?**

As the mainstay for reproducing citizen-subjects and national culture, a mother's allegiance to the nation-state is a fundamental component in sustaining an imagined community. When authoritarian governments rely on disappearance, forced imprisonment, and torture to repress opposition, such violence irrevocably breaks the social contract between the proverbial mothers of the nation and the paternal nation-state. Maternal protest speaks of deep fissures the women experience in their lives and in society. Such fissures give birth to conflicting moral dramas where the "good" or survival of the nation is pitted against motherly love.

I argue maternal protest is a type of movement made up of women – primarily mothers – in different cultures, moments in time, and political contexts who articulate their political activity as an extension of a protectionist love for their children harmed (or who have the potential to be

harmed) by state violence<sup>1</sup>. If, as Weber (1948) argues, the state is “a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (78), then maternal protest publicly questions its legitimacy. Moreover, maternal protest relies on the moral authority culturally ascribed to motherhood.

Similar to other ritual social dramas (like gender), maternal protests are performative “in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (Butler 1990:173). Such a performance is powerful because it forces the viewer to experience a disjuncture between the physical or tangible acts of mothering and the ideology of motherhood that defines “good” mothers. In other words, in addition to being a relation of kinship, motherhood is a politicized ideology. In maternal protest, such ideologies are no longer invisible but is physically enacted for all to see and critique. Their clothing and accessories (Hebdige 1979; Kidder 2005; Swidler 1986), body movements and vocal inflections (Goffman 1959; Alexander 2004), and the time/space of protest (Fraser 1992; Mische 2005) all retain meaning and contribute to the fusion of a maternal protest. Such performances force the viewer to experience a disjuncture between the tangible acts of mothering and the ideological creation of the nation-state. In other words, maternal ideology is no longer invisible but is physically enacted all to see and critique.

Maternal protests have been performed by a variety of women in both formal and informal organizations throughout the world. More formalized groups define themselves primarily via their social roles as mothers and structure their organizations similar to bureaucratic models seen in other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Such is the case with

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<sup>1</sup> My focus on state violence excludes other maternal organizations such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving, La Leche League International, and the Mothers of Greenham Common.

Argentina's Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (the Madres), El Salvador's Mothers of the Disappeared (CO-MADRES), Russia's Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, and China's Tiananmen Mothers.

In addition, some maternal protestors may view their activism as part of a larger movement, but still reflect on their social roles as mothers as part of their impetus for political action. For instance, Chile's El Poder Feminino and Mujeres Por La Vida were not explicitly maternal protest organizations. Members in both groups viewed themselves as part of a larger women's movement that incorporated an ideology of motherhood as one of several orienting frames for action. However such groups' consistent invocation of "social motherhood" (Miller 1991:97) as a source from which to frame and legitimate their political activity is arguably an extension of maternal protest. Social motherhood refers to a belief in women's higher moral standards and maternal instincts as necessary for creating good citizens (Richards 2004:33). For example, advertisement by Chile's Poder Feminino rationalized their protest against Salvador Allende in the infamous March of the Empty Pots in terms of providing nourishment for their children:

... We women are going to protest because there is no meat to make soup for our babies and as a result, they get sick from diarrhea... We want our children to be educated in liberty and democracy and we protest against the brainwashing that occurs in the schools. (Baldez 2001:279)

Maternal protest can occur outside a formal organization. One such instance occurs when individual women who socially identify as mothers protest measures taken by their nation-state. In her work on reproductive policies, Nira Yuval-Davis (1993) quotes a common Palestinian saying, "the Israelis beat us on the borders but we beat them in the bedrooms" (630). In other words, Palestinian women relied on their reproductive capability as a form of resistance that was outside of a larger and more formally articulated movement. Similarly, Irish nationalist women

spontaneously took to the streets in 1970 to protest the curfew imposed by the British army. It was their inability to attain a basic provision for their children – milk – that spurred the women to action. As Begoña Aretxaga (1997) relates, women took to the streets because of a shared conceptualization of maternal morality:

...the law of moral obligation to family is superior to that of political law that commands obedience to a superior power. And when the latter interferes with the former...the moral order is upturned, and action demanded. Motherhood becomes then a major site of ethics. (59)

Others, such as the Kikuyu Mothers in Kenya, the Association of Algerian Mothers, and the Saturday Mothers in Turkey informally organize around their identity as mothers in protest and rely on connections to formalized NGOs like Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International.

### **National Bodies, National Mothers**

The body has become a crucial node in the modern era for what Foucault (1978) terms bio-power, wherein the modern state attempts to control citizens through "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations" (140). As a site for gender construction, the body is used as a representation or symbol of the nation as a whole. Such social imaginaries translate into systematic rape during wartime or other forms of torture aimed at humiliating the enemy body politic; how the womb is perceived as national territory; and how members of mothers' peace organizations around the world use their bodies as a landscape to reassert their disappeared children and challenge government terror. In other words, women's bodies act as the symbolic fecundity of the nation, as well as the vessel for its physical reproduction.

Referring to Benedict Anderson's "imagined community," McClintock (1996) defines nationalism as "systems of cultural representation whereby people come to imagine a shared experience of identification with an extended community" (260). If we accept Anderson's

proposal that the nation is an "imagined community", then it stands to reason that *how* we imagine our community fundamentally influences how we experience it. Giving birth, for example, has different meanings for the woman who feels she is fulfilling her civic duty by producing a citizen for her nation, for the woman who feels that her reproductive powers are being exploited by her nation, and for the woman who is told that she is contributing to the "population problem" of her nation. Brown and Ferree (2005) contend nationalist discourses bind a nation's strength and authenticity to the biological and cultural reproduction of its people, thus making "women's roles as reproducers central to nationalist projects" (6). Consequently, women's bodies become the physical and symbolic borders to be defended in order to ensure the survival of a nation's people and culture.

Ideologies that use women's bodies in defining nation also perpetuate discourses of women as the natural bearers of culture and tradition. According to Yuval-Davis (1997), "gender relations are at the heart of cultural constructions of social identities and collectivities as well as in most cultural conflicts and contestations" (p. 39). Referring to how women are constructed as symbolic "border guards," Yuval-Davis details how women's dress and behavior are closely monitored as a means of cultural separation (p. 23), thus propagating a specific type of nation.

That nationalism constructs women as symbolic borders separating cultures and peoples (Yuval-Davis 1997) is evident in the political rhetoric regarding reproduction and motherhood. During both World Wars the United States distributed explicit wartime propaganda and encouraged popular consumption of images exalting the importance of American mothers for the war effort (Heineman 2001; Zeiger 1996). At the same time, social prestige for German women was based on the size of her family and the Nazi government distributed awards to all "good" Aryan mothers: a bronze medal for five children, silver for six, and gold medal for seven (Koonz

1989:186). Another method officials can use to encourage their country's women to reproduce is by limiting legally and discursively limiting their reproductive freedoms. While an obvious attempt to solidify control over the social body, these law also connect women's reproductive capacity to their worth as citizens. As is shown by Julie Mostov (1995), when Hungarian nationalism condemns abortion as a national catastrophe responsible for the deaths of over four million Hungarians, the death of the fetus is equated to the demise of the country itself.

Nationalism and pronatalism support cultural pronatalist ideological projects whereby “procreation becomes a patriotic, religious, or eugenic obligation, and motherhood is constructed as the central feature of female identity” (Brown and Ferree 2005:8). An example of a successful merging of national and cultural pronatalist projects is seen in the work by Susan Martha Kahn (2000) on Israeli reproductive technologies. She predicts that some form of motherhood will become a social inevitability for all Jewish women in Israel due to the overwhelming acceptance of reproductive technologies by the Israeli government and people as a guaranteed method to grow the nation: “Motherhood is always and everywhere good, regardless of the extent of fertility treatment involved in achieving it...” (69). The state of Israeli has laid claim to the production of its future (cyborg)citizens. Such problematic frameworks leave little room for agency and increasingly draw women into the heart of political conflicts. However, women have begun to reclaim power over their bodies through calculated positioning in moral protest.

*National Mothers: Argentina's Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*

Active since the 1970s, the Madres engaged in a variety of protests to uncover information about their disappeared children and to shed light on the hidden violence during Argentina's “Dirty War” from 1976 to 1983. The Madres “organized one of the most visible and original resistance movements to a brutal dictatorship in the twentieth century” (Taylor

1997:184) and served as model for maternal protests around the world. Famously known for their weekly protest in the heart of Buenos Aires' financial, government, and business district (the Plaza de Mayo), the Madres gathered each Thursday at 3:30 p.m. to walk counterclockwise in pairs around the center of the square. Moving against the flow, they disrupted the flow of life for everyday people, thereby eliciting participation in the mothers' spectacle. Wearing photographs of the missing, constructing life-sized cardboard cutouts, and embroidering names onto pillowcases and headscarves, the Madres transformed themselves into walking billboards in order to prevent the physical and symbolic death of their disappeared children. Through their continued public mourning, the Madres attempted to ensure that their children were not forgotten.

Dressing down as dowdy old women, the mothers wore plain attire concealing all hints of sexuality, thus conforming to the chaste, moral, and unworldly connotation of the apolitical mother. However, after the protest, some quickly changed into modern clothing in order to avoid arrest, knowing that the police would be searching their traditional alter egos. Taylor asserts that "playing the role of mother was also fun and empowering...for once, they manipulated the images that previously had controlled them" (p. 195). That these images are available and susceptible to manipulation identifies them as socially constructed and, thus, malleable.

The symbol of the Madres, a white headscarf, represented not only their organization, but, also a way for the mothers to identify their disappeared children. Originally, the headscarf was a traditional gauze diaper, but the material did not have the durability needed to survive the protests. They soon adapted white shawls and embroidered on them their children's name and date of disappearance. "The shawls symbolized peace, life and maternal ties, and they represented the claim of family bonds and ethical values in the public arena" (Bouvard, 1994, p.

75). The Madres, recognizing the powerful symbol of the shawl, painted images of it on the plaza where they stage their weekly protest, effectively claiming the space as an extension of their own bodies. These painted images also created a permanent presence and helped to solidify their presence in the public sphere. Furthermore, the headscarf's white color signifies peace, while the headscarf itself invokes an image of traditional motherhood. This image incorporates cultural understandings of modesty (in that a majority of a woman's body should be covered), propriety (in that the mothers are fulfilling their maternal duties) and humility (in that they are simple, non-political, and unworldly women). As signifiers of non-sexuality, the Madres counter the idea that women in the public sphere are whores.

Protesting the various forms of state-sponsored violence against their children brings into the public what was "formerly considered private matters of family sustenance and gender relations" (Friedman 1998:98). By invoking a non-threatening image of motherhood and reflecting scenes of domestic life, the Madres deliberately sought to refute accusations of being and/or supporting political subversives while underscoring their desire simply to learn information about their children. "They claimed that it was precisely their maternal responsibilities as 'good' mothers that took them to the plaza in search of their children" (Taylor 1997:187).

In societies where "good" mothers are apolitical and consumed by family and household responsibilities, venturing into the public sphere transforms strips them of any claim to the social privileges of motherhood. Moreover, in such contexts, the only legitimate women in the public sphere are those who have been delegitimized and labeled crazy or prostitutes, thus effectively marking them as social aberrations. "Good mothers are invisible. They do not gather in groups; they stay home with their children" (Taylor, 1997, p. 195). The women can either be good

mothers, venturing into the public sphere to protect their children, or good citizens reifying a maternal ideology that dictates they stay at home.

The Madres completely attributed their presence in the public sphere to searching for their children. They did not deal with issues of equality, reproductive rights, or a myriad of other social concerns – only their children’s whereabouts and well-being were of importance. However, the mothers’ search for their missing children also removed them from supporting their remaining families. Time invested in preparing for the protest, traveling to and from the protest, and protesting were all times away from engaging in the traditional motherly duties they were supposed to embody. Furthermore, by entering into the public sphere, the Madres put themselves and their remaining families in danger. These contradictions are voraciously noted by the state in its desire to discount and dismiss the mothers as “crazy” and “misguided” as well as to punish the mothers for their subversive behavior.

### **Protective Visibility**

Women have – at least initially – been quite successful in gaining access to public forums for protest specifically because they are usually assumed to be nonpolitical and focused solely on domesticity and reproduction. As Diana Taylor (1997) explains,

The role of mother was attractive, not because it was "natural," but because it was viable and practical. It offered the women a certain legitimacy and authority in a society that values mothers almost to the exclusion of all other women. It offered them visibility in a representational system that rendered most women invisible. (193)

According to Friedman (1998), repression of traditional actors by authoritarian regimes makes it almost impossible for men to mobilize oppositional movements as they are immediately labeled subversive and imprisoned, exiled, tortured, or killed. “Women can mobilize precisely because their gender is not associated with political life, and therefore their supposedly nonpolitical identity disguises their political actions” (89). However, the legitimacy and authority initially

granted to protesting women quickly fades once authoritarian regimes begin to recast them as unworthy of the protection and honor typically afforded mothers. In addition, Richards (2004) reminds us that women's mobilization against authoritarian governments was rarely free of danger: "It may have been safer for women to mobilize than it was for men, but it certainly was not safe. Women have suffered sex-specific forms of torture, rape, and murder at the hands of authoritarian governments across the globe..." (39). Indeed, Taylor (1997) reports that in December of 1997 the military junta in Argentina disappeared twelve Madres while intensifying its harassment and detentions (188).

The ultimate success and physical safety of the maternal protesters depends on their ability to remain visible in the public sphere. However, the more successful or prominent a group is, the more potential for individual members and their families to experience physical danger. For example, María Alejandra Bonafini was tortured in her Argentinean home after two men posing as telephone repairpersons gained entry. Beaten with a rubber chain, burned with cigarettes, and almost asphyxiated from the plastic bag tied around her head, Bonafini was lucky to escape with her life. The brutal violence was intended as a warning to her mother, Hebe de Bonafini, president of the Madres. Attacking the mother through her daughter bespeaks a twisted critique Hebe as a "bad" mother.<sup>2</sup>

Essential in sustaining the much-needed protective visibility are the relationships the maternal protestors foster. Solidarity between the maternal protesters and international media outlets, international celebrities, NGOs, foreign governments, and even other maternal protesters can offer additional political and economic support for each group and increase their visibility in the public sphere. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are two of the most

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<sup>2</sup> Disturbingly, Bonafini's experience was no different from that of thousands of other tortured accused insurgents - with one important exception: hers took place eighteen years after the end of the Dirty War on May 25, 2001 ("Fear for Safety", 2001; Gaudin, 2001).

prominent international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that can propel a local maternal protest into an international spectacle and crusade. Keck and Sikkink (1998) indicate that such networks evolve as activists team with larger communities to address a particular issue. They argue that the proliferation of transnational advocacy networks helped to bring out international activism for issues such as human rights, the environment, and women's rights. However, should larger NGOs or international organizations decide that a current issue is no longer of concern, then the smaller organization is potentially left without a beneficiary or protector. Moreover, maternal protestors who are without a formal organized and rely on media outlets such as Amnesty International are not guaranteed accurate representation of their cause, goals, intent, and need.

International media outlets are powerful synoptic tools with which to broker a desired effect with the state. By choosing to highlight a maternal protest, international media outlets not only increase the maternal protestors longevity in the public consciousness (visibility) but also exponentially increase the potential they have for influencing political change in their respective countries. While the media can be useful to maternal protestors, portraying the women as faceless victims of "Third World violence" dismisses them as capable of self-determination and agency. Discourses surrounding such images directly influence the roles available to women and support essentialist constructions of them as weak and in need of protection. Maternal protestors specifically capitalize on such discourses when positioning themselves as non-threatening women searching for information about their children. However, that the mothers invoke essentialist stereotypes surrounding the depiction of women in political violence suggests that the media is inclined to publicize images as they align with preconceived notions of women's "natural" role as victim.

International celebrities are another source of support for maternal protesters. For instance, Euro-American pop singer Sting wrote about the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in his song “They Dance Alone (Gueca Solo)”,<sup>3</sup> while Bono of U2, a known human rights activist, staged public appearances with them. Foreign governments are often sympathetic to mothers’ organizations as was seen by the financial and political support given to the Madres by Swedish and Italian governments (Bouvard, 1994; Taylor, 1997). The United States is a continued supporter of the Tiananmen Mothers, the Union of the Committees of Soldiers’ Mothers, the Saturday Mothers, and Algerian Mothers in their fight for human rights. Former First Lady Hillary Clinton, voiced alliance with the Algerian Mothers of the Disappeared and “agreed to bring the issue of ‘disappearances’ in Algeria to the broadest possible audience” (Haenn, 1999, para. 1). She also supported Amnesty’s desire to have the United States approach the Algerian President in the hopes of allowing the United Nations as well as NGOs access to investigate the situation. While foreign governments may be a source of political and/or economic support, the political ramifications of such support may result in physical harm to the maternal protesters and/or generate a nationalist backlash against them. Solidarity between maternal protesters during a spectacle confers additional authenticity while increasing visibility and longevity in the public sphere for both groups. As an example, in October of 1996, Amnesty International launched a month-long campaign to bring attention to the disappeared and human rights violations in Turkey. To mark this occasion, they flew relatives of disappeared persons from all over the world to Istanbul, including a mother from the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina.

National media include sources other than the press such as playwrights, authors, entertainers, filmmakers, and other artists. A myriad of films, plays, poems, and songs have been written about the Madres and the Saturday Mothers, for example. According to their website, the

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<sup>3</sup> “They Dance Alone (Gueca Solo)” ...*Nothing Like the Sun* (October 5, 1987)

Tiananmen Mothers have been an inspiration for Chinese artists who have helped to create their symbolic logo. While these sources can be in danger of state retribution for their support of the mothers' causes, they are instrumental in transforming the spectacle into national mythology and generating an iconic status for the mothers, thus creating an enduring spectacle and ensuring the protective visibility. Finally, solidarity between mothers' organizations confers additional maternal authenticity while increasing visibility and longevity in the public sphere for both groups.

*A Transnational Alliance: the Saturday Mothers of Turkey and the Argentinean Madres*

Considered to be Turkey's equivalent to the Argentinean Madres, the Saturday Mothers' protest began on May 27, 1995 when, after being disappeared for 59 days, the burned and badly bruised of Hasan Ocak was found. "It was Saturday at noon when we removed the shroud and saw his face...In memory of that moment we sit each week on Saturday at 12:00[pm]" (Laber, n.d., para. 5). Each week the Saturday Mothers bussed to Galatasaray Square and walked to Galatasaray High School to hold a silent vigil at noon on Saturday. The mothers sat on the concrete in front of the high school and wore framed photos of the disappeared while holding red carnations. A prepared press statement detailing the case of one of the disappeared was read aloud, but otherwise the vigil is intended to remain silent.

The incorporation of silence into the weekly protest was effective on several levels and reflects a creative use of the body. At its most basic or obvious, the mothers' silence bespeaks of how no words could fully express the pain of losing a child and that such attempts would belittle their suffering. Their silence may also be understood as an attempt to discursively engage the Turkish government by mirroring the official response to the mothers' inquiries. In addition, mothers – or women, more generally – in the public sphere have been traditionally silenced by

patriarchal ideology that marks them as invisible and to be ignored when outside of the home. Finally, silence can be understood as but one part of the mothers' rite to differentiate the location and purpose of the protest as sacred. Being silent or abstaining from engaging in an everyday act of speech reflects what Durkheim refers to as a negative rite, the purpose of which is to differentiate people or things by setting them apart from the profane.

Many people attended the silent vigil alongside the Saturday Mothers, including foreign visitors, human rights activists, national and international press, and other protesting groups who effectively operate as audience and participants. Also nearby were the Turkish police who donned grey ribbons – another symbol of mourning - in remembrance of colleagues killed by Kurdish attacks (“The day”). Their presence attempted to discount the claims of the Saturday Mothers that their children were innocent victims of Turkish impunity. At some point during each demonstration, the police would violently break up the peaceful protest and detain or imprison the Saturday Mothers and their supporters. Those who are not jailed disperse only to re-enact the ritual again the following Saturday at noon to ask the world, “Tell me, do you have any news about my son?” (Arifcan, 1997, para. 2). Even the words used imply a performed naïveté typically associated with a woman unfamiliar with politics, innocent of worldly knowledge, and whose only focus is on the whereabouts of her child. Furthermore, while there are instances of women being disappeared, the mothers typically referred to the missing as “sons.” This could be an indication of a masculine language translation or, as mentioned earlier, that the majority of people who physically experience state-sponsored violence are men. Spanning 200 Saturdays, the mothers concluded their protest on March 13, 1999 as a result of increasingly violent measures taken by the government (Baydar and İvegen 2006)

In October of 1996, Amnesty International launched a month-long campaign to bring attention to human rights violations in Turkey. To mark this occasion, they flew relatives of disappeared persons from all over the world to Istanbul to demonstrate with the Saturday Mothers. Included was Mirta Acuna de Baravalles, an Argentinian Madre, who addressed the crowd saying, "As a mother of a missing person, the mothers here are in my heart. We are here to support these mothers and to protest to those in politics and in government who stay silent on this matter"(Ayik & Yoruk, 1996, para. 4).

A powerful image (see Appendix A) accompanies a similar article from the Turkish Daily News on October 10, 1996 and shows Baravalles gazing lovingly at a framed picture held by a Turkish maternal protestor, a Saturday Mother. One presumes the young man in the picture is the Saturday Mother's disappeared son. Like the Madres, the Saturday Mothers' physical appearance reflected their social role. In the image, we observe modest clothing fashioned to reveal a minimal amount of skin and projecting a non-threatening, maternal image. Typically dressed in all black with white headscarves, the mothers evidenced little to no makeup and accessorized only with pictures of their missing or dead children and red carnations. While red flowers traditionally signify romantic love, they are also the color of blood and may symbolize the violence experienced by their disappeared children. Moreover, the use of flowers and childhood photos authenticate the high school as a memorial where people pay respects to those no longer physically embodied. While the Saturday Mother is pictured from the waist-up, the framed photo she carries is so large that only her head and hands are clearly visible. It is obviously a picture taken from her home and symbolizes a merger of public and private spheres.

TRANSITION

## Limitations

There are limits to maternal protest. One consequence of relying on a gender discourse that frames maternal activism as rooted in domestic and maternal virtues is the reification of the public/private divide (Richards 2004). For instance, the mothers base their protest on the grounds that the state's abusive entrance into the private sphere violated a "normal" social order. It implies that the mothers support the gendered separation of space that restricts their legitimate participation as citizens, even though it is this restrictive separation that necessitated a political motherhood to begin with.

Furthermore, according to Spivak (1987), relying on the strategic deployment of gendered essentialism for an extended period of time also has the capacity to reaffirm the oppressive structures of nationalism and patriarchy. In other words, strategic essentialism can be an effective short-term strategy to affirm a political identity, but can quickly become fixed as an essentialist category by a dominant group. Thus, because the mothers have solidified a political identity associated with nationalist ideologies of motherhood, their ability to address or subvert larger gender inequalities is in doubt. Finally, by contributing to the discourse surrounding what constitutes a good or bad mother, maternal protestors lose an opportunity to subvert such a dichotomy that so brutally inscribed on their "bad" children's bodies. And, most importantly, it suggests an uncritical acceptance of the patriarchal nationalism that defines a woman's value as existing only in her ability to symbolize, purify, or reproduce the nation.

Another issue is the extent to which transnational advocacy networks guard against reproducing a neocolonial framework in defining what issues are worthy of "defending." Relying on the same understandings on which the colonial project was based (modernization, Western infallibility, and white hegemony) large NGOs look to Third world women to symbolize the

extent to which their nation has achieved modernization. They become an informal measure justifying neoliberal reforms, structural adjustment policies, and other forms of neocolonialism. As Abu-Lughod (2002) reminds, “we need to be suspicious when neat cultural icons are plastered over messier historical and political narratives” (785) so as to prevent the continued colonization of the Other. Furthermore, the idea of the civilized saving victim women from their barbaric men is one that takes away all agency from the "victim women" themselves.

Like Mohanty (1991[1984]), Narayan (1997) argues for feminists to engage in cultural research that is “historically attentive” and geographically specific. Feminists should also abstain from situating patriarchy as a universal phenomenon similarly oppressing all women, regardless of historical and cultural contexts. As such, I’ve avoided framing the maternal protestors as cultural objects for study. Doing so would effectively silence the social actors themselves and ‘disappear’ the violence, impunity, and state repression. However even being actively attuned to the dangers of universalizing the experiences of all maternal protestors for the purposes of generalization, it’s quite likely that the material conditions, historical and cultural contexts of several groups have been occluded by my selection of materials, data, and cases to present.

## CONCLUSION

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<sup>4</sup> Turkish Daily News copyright notice grants permission for personal use: Turkish Daily News. (1996, October 29). Amnesty International also visits families of PKK victims. Retrieved June 6, 2004 from [http://www.turkishdailynews.com/old\\_editions/10\\_29\\_96/for.htm](http://www.turkishdailynews.com/old_editions/10_29_96/for.htm)

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