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THE SPATIALITY OF COLLECTIVE ACTION:
FLEXIBLE NETWORKS AND SYMBOLIC PERFORMANCES
AMONG THE MADRES DE PLAZA DE MAYO IN ARGENTINA

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of the Ohio State University

By

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*****

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relations between geography and social movements. It approaches this subject from a critical human geography perspective that takes spatiality—the mutual constitution of space and society—as the theoretical starting point and analytical guiding concept. It blends the contemporary academic literatures on social movements and spatiality with theories of social networks and of social relations as performances. Through a theoretical synthesis, it provides an analytical framework that demonstrates that the sustainability, duration, and mobilization outcomes of collective action are related to different dimensions of the spatiality of social relations. The study is grounded empirically through an in-depth historical and comparative analysis of the Madres de Plaza Mayo, a network of human rights activists in Argentina that has remained active for a quarter of a century. The analysis is based on a large set of qualitative data assembled through ethnographic and archival research.

Regarding the sustainability and duration of collective action, the study demonstrates how the Madres sustain group cohesion through the deployment of various strategies. The Madres maintain a territorially widespread community of activists through the practice of collective performances in plazas across Argentina. Such place-based performances enhance network cohesion and social proximity despite physical distance.
The collective performances also give the Madres’ visibility, facilitate recruitment, and cement emotional bonds among members. Moreover, collective performances enacted at different spatial scales—through activists’ bodies and through the modification of the urban built environment—are a mechanism for the resolution of internal group conflicts, further contributing to the sustainability of the Madres’ activism. The performative dimensions of the Madres’ activism demonstrate that how social movements sustain cohesion is dependent on their embeddedness in both material and symbolic places and on the strategies that activists devise to manage the spatiality of their networks.

The outcomes of the Madres’ mobilization strategies are related to the geographic flexibility that characterizes their networks of activists and supporters. The Madres have constructed networks with strategic connections—bridges—that operate at a variety of spatial scales and that allow them to tap other networks and to access resources crucial for sustaining their mobilization strategies. Furthermore, the Madres use symbolic framings of the plazas as a tool to build and sustain further network connections with other social movements. The Madres’ coalition-building strategies rely on network connections that are geographically flexible. Both their inter-personal and inter-organizational networks exhibit a dynamic spatiality that encompasses different types of network relations moving across personal, local, national, and international scales.

Overall, the case of the Madres demonstrates that the sustainability of strategies of collective action often hinges upon actors’ strategic capacity to maneuver different types of relations through networks in place and across spatial scales.
Dedicated to the Madres de Plaza de Mayo
and to all those who continue the struggle for truth, memory, and justice
regarding human rights violations in Argentina and Latin America
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CHAPTER 1

A GEOGRAPHER’S VIEW
OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND COLLECTIVE ACTION:
THE CASE OF THE MADRES DE PLAZA DE MAYO

1.1-Introduction

I began high school outside Buenos Aires in 1984. It was an exciting time. Argentines had just elected a president after 7 years of bloody dictatorship, responsible for the death of about 30,000 people. It was during that first year in high school at age thirteen that I learned how an electoral democracy worked and found out that the large building smack in the middle of downtown (similar in architectural style to the U.S. Capitol) was not an empty museum but, rather, the National Congress where elected officials were going to discuss and enact the laws that would govern my life. The same year, I also learned about the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, a group of middle-aged women turned activists who had been demanding the return of their “disappeared” sons and daughters since 1977 through innovative public displays of civil disobedience. Their children had been the target of military-sponsored forced abductions or “disappearances”. The women wanted their children back alive. They also wanted those responsible for the
crimes to be punished to the full extent of the law. To achieve visibility, the Madres had been meeting in the Plaza de Mayo (the central square in downtown Buenos Aires, across from the presidential offices) every week for seven years, defying the military.

For the first time, I was experiencing what it was like to live in a country with a functioning democracy, no matter how precarious. The idea that one could say, read, or sing whatever one wished was fascinating to me. Many groups at this time sought truth and justice in response to the excesses committed by the former military government against the civilian population. Of all the groups in this burgeoning human rights movement, the Madres most impressed me. Their public activism and the irreverence of their actions in the most unusual places, even during the years of the dictatorship, captivated me. Two years later, in 1986, I watched the Madres climb on stage to meet with rock legend Sting during a concert in Buenos Aires sponsored by Amnesty International. Seeing this group of women standing in silence and holding each other's hands in front of a packed stadium further cemented my admiration for their heroism.

My fascination and admiration for the Madres continued over the years, developing into an academic interest. Almost fourteen years later, when I began studying social movements and collective action as a geography doctoral student in the United States, the Madres were still active, making headlines in Argentina and around the world. I began reading what had been written about the Madres and found interesting research. Many studies approached the Madres from a historical, journalistic, and biographical perspective. These studies revealed a great deal about the Madres' activities, especially the harsh conditions under which the group began during the military dictatorship (Bousquet, 1994; Simpson and Bennet, 1985; Fisher, 1989; Arrosagaray, 1997; Braceli, 1999).
I was surprised to find that even the *Madres* themselves (both as a collective and as individuals) had written and published their own histories (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1995; Mellibovsky, 1997).

Other authors wrote about the *Madres*’ activism in the context of an extensive literature on contemporary social movements and collective action in Latin America (Eckstein, 1989; Escobar and Alvarez, 1992; Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar, 1998; for a review of the literature, see Haber, 1996). A subsection of this literature is concerned with understanding women’s collective action and protest in Latin America, and, in particular with specifying how women’s activism is shaped by specific constructions of gender and political identities and by everyday practices (Radcliffe and Westwood, 1993). Therefore, the *Madres*’ activism became an excellent case study for scholars writing on these topics. For example, Scarpaci and Frazier (1993) analyzed the mobilization practices of human rights movements in the Southern Cone and described the *Madres* as a group of activists that “gendered” the landscape of Latin American social movements. Jelin (1990) and Navarro (1989) further clarified how the *Madres* were able to mobilize in struggle for human rights while at the same time asserting women’s solidarity in Argentina. Radcliffe (1993) focused on highlighting the significance of the social and physical spaces occupied by the women who identify as *Madres* relative to the prevailing status and image of women in Argentina. In a less celebratory tone, she also analyzed the limitations of the *Madres*’ activities for an effective feminist politics of resistance. Finally, in “Revolutionizing Motherhood”, Bouvard (1994) combined a historical review of the *Madres* with an ethnographic account of her interaction with some of the women, providing an insightful narrative of the more personal and subjective
dimensions of the Madres' struggle. These are some of the most relevant examples of several writings in which the Madres' activism is the central focus of attention; several other scholars also used the case of the Madres in the context of their broader research agendas as an example of significant collective action (Mitchell, 1996; Taylor D, 1997).

Still, there were dimensions of the Madres' activism about which I could not find any discussion. Through the processes of learning how and why social movements emerge, how activists recruit others and mobilize, and how they attempt to achieve and maintain a sense of shared goals and identities, I began to be interested in the duration (so far 25 years) of the Madres' activism. Specifically, existing studies of the Madres to date have not been linked to the different theories of social movements and collective action that seek to explain why and how social movements sustain activism or dissolve. The question of how the Madres sustained activism for so many years puzzled me.

1.2-The puzzle of the Madres' continued activism

I wanted to further understand the dynamics of this unlikely group of activists (women who seemed to have no activist or political experience), so I began thinking and trying to frame a broad research question about the sustained activism of the Madres. I knew that in the context of a negative climate for the human rights movement in Argentina and Latin America in general (see Jelin, 1998), the Madres continued to mobilize. Over the years, the Madres have become an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991) of activists, with their own practices of territorialization and cohesion. At present, their hundreds of members are scattered in over twenty cities in Argentina, and Madres de Plaza de Mayo "support groups" are spread out across Europe and North America,
forming a network of activists that spans from the local to the global. Some of the smaller groups of Madres have only two or three members, yet these are among the most fervent activists. Every week, Madres de Plaza de Mayo gather in plazas across the country to conduct silent demonstrations. Once a year, Madres from across Argentina gather in the Plaza de Mayo for a massive 24-hour demonstration, joined by thousands of activists from Argentina and abroad. Despite geographic distance among many of the members and in spite of existing organizational divisions, the Madres remain a fairly cohesive group of activists. They are an example of sustained collective action with little precedent in Latin America and the world in general. How can their resilience be explained?

While being impressed by their cohesiveness, at the same time I was puzzled by the internal conflicts that emerged within the Madres' community starting in the early 1980s, once a democratic government was again in place in Argentina. My impressions about the continuity and sustained cohesion of these activists were constantly challenged by my knowledge of the existence of an organizational rift and ensuing conflict between two different groups of Madres in 1986. Whereas on the one hand the Madres appeared cohesive and united, on the other I knew that there had been turf battles over leadership as well as disagreements about how to define their goals and their strategies of mobilization in the context of democracy. Such internal conflicts are mostly unknown to the general public in Argentina, and furthermore, they have not been investigated by scholars even though they are visible today and in some ways even define what the Madres de Plaza de Mayo have become. The Madres appeared to me as a social movement community riddled with contradictions: conflicts despite unity, cohesion despite divisions. How can such continuity amid conflict be explained?
1.3-The view from geography

These questions are the motivation behind this study. As a geographer, developing an answer to questions about the Madres' cohesion and resilience in the context of external pressure and internal conflict entails more than applying ideas from political science and sociology to a new empirical context. Answering these questions from a geographic perspective requires analysis of the spatiality of processes of cohesion and conflict among the Madres. In other words, besides thinking about the activism of the Madres historically and besides interpreting their politics and strategies from a sociological perspective, I want to think about their sustained activism using a critical spatial imagination. My move is in many ways consistent with what scholars (Soja, 1989; Soja 1996; Soja, 1999; Thrift and Crang, 2000) have called a “spatial turn” in the humanities and the social sciences. As the geographer Soja explains:

“For the past two centuries, ontological discussion has focused primarily on the temporal and social characteristics of human existence...the existential relations between the historicality and sociality of being-in-the-world...Today, however, the inherent spatiality of being and becoming is beginning to be more forcefully recognized than ever before, injecting an assertive third term into the ontology of human existence” (Soja, 1999, 261-262)

This recent emphasis on “the spatial” (which has taken place mostly among geographers but has also touched many other disciplines, from anthropology to cultural studies), however, does not indicate that a spatial dimension has begun to (or should be) “privileged” over other ones (e.g., social, historical). Instead, an explicit attention to the spatiality of social processes has added another layer in the understanding of complex social phenomena (see, for example, Cresswell, 1996). Below (as well as in Chapter 2), I
briefly explain how critical human geographers today are defining and understanding this spatiality and I also specify where this study about the *Madres* is positioned relative to such understandings of the spatiality of social life and social processes and in the context of contemporary geography as a discipline.

I want to clarify at the outset that the perspective that guides this study is one of many ways of thinking spatially about history and social relations and it is one of several geographic perspectives. Within the discipline of Geography there is no unified "geographic perspective". Geographers' views about how to describe or explain phenomena are multiple and many times fragmented. It is more appropriate to talk about perspectives and geographies rather than about geography in general. Let me elaborate this point briefly by discussing the evolution of geographic questions. My comments about such evolution are not meant to be a comprehensive history of the discipline; rather my intention is to help situate this study in the context of geography overall. The history of geographic thought is obviously more complex and there are extensive volumes dealing with the subject.

Historically, the discipline of geography has followed and endorsed different perspectives; many of them still coexist today, though certainly in different forms. In the United States, for example, early 20th century foci on the analysis of human-environmental relations and on the study of geographic regions were replaced by the re-conceptualization of geography as "spatial science" towards the middle of the century. Geographers adopted new quantitative methodologies (e.g., inferential statistics and mathematical modeling), focused on the identification of spatial patterns, and attempted to formulate predictive laws of spatial behavior. By the 1970s, there were clearly three
(often overlapping) geographic "views" or "traditions": the human-land view that emphasized studies of relations between humans and the environment, the area study view that focused on the study of places and regions, and the spatial view that centered on analysis of both patterns and processes of the spatial organization of phenomena (Taaffe, 1974).¹

To some extent, these three views of geography continue today, but there have been substantial modifications and additions to the way in which geographers think about and conceptualize central geographic concepts that are common to these three traditions (such as space, place, region, etc.). The case of the spatial tradition in human geography is specifically relevant here due to the nature of the analysis in this study. Even though geography as "spatial science" has been widely criticized for its uncritical embrace of positivism², it still has a strong hold in the discipline and has even been re-invigorated in recent years. Specifically, as new technologies (such as geographic information systems)

¹ This progression and description of the history of geography is oversimplified for the purpose of clarity and brevity. For example, there has not been just one single regional or areal differentiation tradition in geography, but actually several varieties of it. This view included a "natural regions" approach that saw regions as unique geographic entities (Herberston, 1905), a French-school approach that emphasized the role of human occupancy in defining the character of regions (Vidal de la Blache, 1911), and a later "chorological" approach that analyzed regional associations of phenomena (e.g. Sauer, 1925). For a complete discussion of variations within the different traditions in geography, see Cloke et al., 1991.

² This resulted in many faults, including: a filtering out of social and ethical questions through the use of mathematical and geometric language; a false sense of objectivity achieved through the artificial separation of observer from observed, and a focus on "spatial processes" without acknowledging either their social structural underpinnings or the intentions of humans as conscious agents, among others (Cloke et al., 1991, 14). Geographers later began to clarify the problems of spatial fetishism and spatial separatism that also came with an uncritical embrace of positivism (these problems pertain to analysis across the social sciences).
have come of age, new relevant applications for spatial analysis have been found. Additionally, while many practitioners of geography as spatial science have recognized the limitations of their approach to explain the geographic expression of many social and physical processes, they also have shown that such methods can help answer certain kinds of geographic problems.

Other geographers working within the spatial tradition but from different theoretical positions (Marxist, humanist, feminist, and several other post-positivist perspectives) also have continued to think spatially in novel ways. As a result, over the past three decades, an eclectic group of geographers has developed a new "critical" human geography that—even though it is itself complex and internally differentiated—carefully conceptualizes and explains processes by focusing on their spatiality (i.e., a recognition of the inseparability and mutual embeddedness of the social and the spatial). This move has further invigorated the spatial tradition both within geography and outside the discipline and has led to the so-called "spatial turn" in the social sciences and humanities that I have described above.3

3 Analysis of space-society as a mode of geographic inquiry is not the norm of research on human geography in the United States. Even though in the last decades the discipline of human geography in the United States has broadened significantly in relation to its acceptance of different (and many times competing) paradigms, it is still less inclusive than its counterpart in other parts of the world. For example, whereas in the United Kingdom the epistemological significance of the "cultural turn" or of post-positivist thinking is generally understood or acknowledged among scholars in most of geography's sub-disciplines (e.g., economic geography, urban geography, political geography, etc.), this is not so much the case in the United States, where practitioners in some sub-disciplines (e.g. economic geography) have largely not taken notice. As Ettlinger (2001) put it, there are, in fact, "contextually differentiated academic audiences" in geography in the United States and the United Kingdom and each has its own traditions and preferences.
It is at this point, then, that the term "spatiality" becomes relevant; it is also at this juncture where I want to situate my study of the *Madres*. This requires some further clarification. First, the *spatiality* of social processes refers to the mutual constitution of the social and the spatial. Critical human geographers have shown that social relations are geographically constituted and, therefore, that social processes are also spatial (Gregory and Urry, 1985; Sayer, 1985; Harvey, 1989; Soja, 1989; Harvey, 1996; Cox, 1995). Moreover, geographers have also demonstrated that "space" and "place" (two central concepts in human geography) are not merely an outcome of social processes; additionally, *socially produced spatial distributions also affect how social processes work* (Massey, 1984; 1994). For example, it is difficult to separate racist practices from practices of racial segregation, which are commonly realized spatially (as in residential segregation). Residential segregation, in turn, is a cause of other segregations (related to employment or schooling, for example), which in turn reinforce racist practices and racism in general (Young, 2000). Therefore, attention to the relation between the social and the spatial makes a crucial difference in the way one understands the dynamics of social life.

This emphasis on the spatiality of social life is the geographic perspective that I follow in this study of the duration of the *Madres’* activism in Argentina. By focusing on the spatiality of their activism, I want to show that there are dimensions about the *Madres’* experience and history that are made intelligible through a geographic lens. Specifically, I will show that the *Madres’* identification with particular symbolic places, their territorial expansion across Argentina and the formation of a trans-local networks of
activists, and their movement across the country to gather in specific places, are integrally related to their capacity to effectively sustain activism for over two decades.

In sum, I decided to approach my questions regarding the Madres’ cohesion, division, and sustained activism through an examination of the geographic expressions of the Madres’ activism—those dimensions of their activism involving distance, movement, and interactions in places and across space. As I show throughout this study, this particular geographic perspective allows me to pose questions about the Madres that have not surfaced or been approached from either social sciences or humanities perspectives to date, and also inform broader issues of interest to scholars of social movements and to social science more generally. Let me provide more detailed examples of the questions that frame this study and their significance.

1.4-The spatiality of the Madres’ activism: questions and their significance

One of the interesting dimensions of this group of women activists is the link between their public activism and their use of specific public spaces. Not only have the Madres named themselves after a particular place (the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires) but they have also continued meeting in the same place every week on a regular day since the group was first created. Additionally, Madres in other localities in Argentina also have been gathering in their own plazas for over two decades. Such practices are interesting, in particular when they are understood in the context of current understandings of the micro-dynamics of collective action. Although scholars to date have shown that cultural and social practices that are embedded in the networks of daily life contribute to the way activists sustain a shared group identity (Melucci, 1997), the
importance of the embeddedness of such networks in particular places nonetheless remains to be examined in detail. For example, what role have the Madres’ activities in the plazas played in the internal dynamics of their groups? Why is it that public activism in plazas around the country has been the Madres’ most common strategy of mobilization? Could the Madres’ weekly presence in plazas across Argentina be a collective performance that has contributed to the sustained cohesion of the group over time? In this study, I suggest that analyzing the Madres’ gatherings and activities in plazas provides insights into how the placement of practices (i.e., the relation between practices and place) (Thrift, 1999, Amin, 2000) is linked to the way collective action is performed and sustained. I suggest that the Madres’ practices in specific places reveal a critical geographic layer to processes of social movement mobilization. Additionally, I argue that the insights obtained from analysis of the Madres’ collective practices go beyond their case. Through investigating the questions I posed above, I intend to link geographic understandings of place with the dynamics of social cohesion and demonstrate both theoretically and empirically that cohesion is a socio-spatial or geographic process.

Furthermore, the territorial expansion of the Madres and their creation of a network of women activists across Argentina (which I detail later in this study) lead to additional questions regarding the relations between activism, place, and cohesion., Interestingly, for example, despite the Madres’ emphasis on performing group activities in designated plazas in different villages, towns, and cities, their network has remained independent of any one locality. Further, the Madres have remained disconnected from “parochial” local politics (typical of “Not In My Backyard” groups). Why? How is
"place" important for the Madres and what kind of understanding of "place" have the Madres constructed and negotiated over the years? Moreover, over time the Madres gave shape to and remain embedded (i.e., integrated) in a network of activists of wide territorial scope even though many women were separated by large distances and had little interaction with each other. How did they manage to achieve that? What is the relation between place and embeddedness in social networks in their case? These are appealing questions because to date, social scientists (including geographers, sociologists, urban planners, and political scientists) have theorized cohesion and embeddedness in reference to local dimensions of social life, for example in relation to the strong bonds and identification among people who live or interact in a territorial community such as a neighborhood (Castells, 1983). I suggest that an analysis of the Madres' trajectory is instructive in theorizing a more nuanced view of the geographic dimensions of social cohesion. As I will later show, an open sense of place (i.e., place as a nexus of social relations that flow across space) is more important than "the local" (i.e., a bounded geographic scale) in explaining how embeddedness and social cohesion is achieved and sustained.

The existing conflicts between the Madres' also have fueled my geographic imagination and challenged some of my initial assumptions regarding the relation between the placement of practices and the sustainability of collective action. As I have briefly mentioned, the unity and cohesion of the Madres' network has been threatened by conflicts surrounding leadership and by different positions regarding human rights politics that have emerged in the past years. Interestingly, leaders of the groups have purposely attempted to make them visible in the landscape. The disagreements among the
Madres revolve around different politics of memory and commemoration, such as whether and how to remember the recent past and commemorate those who are “disappeared”. Today, the Madres represent such competing views through the use of different kinds of spatial markers at multiple spatial scales. These different spatial manifestations of memory created by the Madres are provocative because research on “memorial landscapes” (e.g. Alderman, 2000) to date has been circumscribed to analyses of representations of memory and history of single sites or single spatial scales. What can one learn, then, about the relations among multiple geographic scales and the creation of memorial landscapes through an analysis of the Madres’ practices? As I will later show, leaders of the Madres’ organizations have relied on the “scaling” of competing politics of memory and commemoration as an explicit strategy for organizational differentiation and recognition. But how does the spatial manifestation of competing politics of memory and the creation of conflicting memorial landscapes impact the unity of a large network of activists? And what does this say about the purposive spatialization of mobilization strategies as an effective way to sustain collective action?

Finally, another interesting dimension of the Madres is the way in which, from the beginning, the Madres were able to create their own networks of supporters through which they obtained resources that contributed to maintaining their activism. Over time, the Madres’ have continued building and modifying their connections to individuals and groups to ensure an ongoing flow of support that could guarantee their continuity. In terms of their effectiveness, the Madres have far surpassed other human rights groups in Argentina who attempted to do the same. What made that possible? Is it possible that the Madres established certain types of connections through different social networks at
particular geographic scales (e.g., local, national, global) at different times as strategies to
mobilize more effectively? What can a geographic analysis of the evolution of the
networks of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo add to our existing knowledge about the
effectiveness of the strategies of social movements? In this study, I argue that answering
such questions can add to our current understanding of the way social networks are
related to mobilization processes of social movements (Knoke and Wisely, 1990; Diani,
1995). Specifically, research to date has demonstrated that social movements not only
rely on social networks of everyday life to mobilize but they also construct inter-
organizational linkages with other social movements and with a multiplicity of cultural
and institutional actors (Alvarez et al., 1998). In terms of geography, such inter-
organizational networks often move across space over time, stretching across territorial
boundaries, and making global connections (Slater, 1998) as activists attempt to gather
support from others and to amass resources that are crucial for the success of their
mobilization strategies (McCarthy and Zald, 1973, 1987; McAdam, 1982). But the
impact that the geographic expression of different network relations has on the
sustainability and effectiveness of strategies of collective action remains unexamined.
The long duration and perseverance of the Madres suggests that their case offers a useful
avenue to specify the role that spatiality plays in the way social movements can more
effectively access resources through networks

This last point about the relation between spatiality and the mobilization of social
movements in general is important because, aside from my own personal interest in the
trajectory of the Madres, I chose to write about them because they constitute an excellent
case study from which it is possible to draw empirical parallels to the experiences of

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other social movements and to make general statements about the geographic dimensions of collective action. The case of the *Madres* is useful because, despite the uniqueness of the duration of their activism, the *Madres* are in fact similar to many other contemporary groups of activists. For example, the women who currently identify as *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* are a social movement community (Buechler, 1990) held together by a combination of a strong collective identity built around a redefined idea of “motherhood” (Bouvard, 1994) and a firm commitment to challenging the power of the state. These dual characteristics—a strong cultural and political orientation—make the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* similar to an increasing number of existing and emerging social movements in Latin America and other parts of the developing world involved in cultural politics, from

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4 The *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* are a social movement community that is part of the human rights movement in Argentina and a key component of a larger international network of human rights groups. I define the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* as a social movement community because their composition is not limited to the existence of formal, bureaucratic, and centralized organizations that group activists and that are commonly known as SMOs (social movement organizations). Throughout this study, I show that even though most *Madres* are affiliated with either one of two large formal organizations (the *Asociacion Madres de Plaza de Mayo* and *Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora*), some women do not claim any organizational affiliation but rather see themselves as a more informally organized network of mothers of disappeared people in Argentina. As I describe in this study, this includes smaller groups of *Madres*, most of whom used to be part of *Asociacion Madres de Plaza de Mayo* but who in recent years have spun off the formal organization to continue their activists’ commitment on their own. Finally the definition of social movement community is useful because previous studies of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* have had the tendency to homogenize the group, masking internal differences among women and among different groups of *Madres* (see for example, Bouvard, 1994).

5 According to Alvarez et al. (1998; pp. 7), cultural politics are processes enacted when sets of social actors shaped by, and embodying different, cultural meanings and practices come into conflict with each other. Meanings and practices that are often considered marginal or residual in relation to a dominant cultural order can become the sources of political processes. Thus, social movements that deploy alternative conceptions of
peasant and ethnic groups to women's organizations (Edelman, 1998; Alvarez et al., 1998). Thus, despite the distinctiveness of the Madres, their general characteristics are instructive for the formulation of general principles that can apply to other contemporary social movements.

In sum, in the chapters that follow, I discuss different dimensions of the spatiality of collective action and ground the research questions through an analysis of the historical and current geographies of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. My interest in explaining processes of collective action from a geographic perspective explains why I focus extensively on the spatiality of social networks, since networks are themselves relations among people. The definition of social movements as networks and the understanding of collective action from a network perspective has become a feature of scholarly work in the past years (Diani, 1995). Therefore, thinking specifically about the Madres as a series of networks of social relations allows me to work through the puzzling questions regarding both the geographic dimensions of cohesion and division in this social movement community.

1.5-Plan of the study

I have organized this study in the following way. In the next chapter, I position myself as a researcher of the Madres and elaborate the conceptual framework for my analysis. I discuss the ways in which both biographical circumstances and academic democracy, justice, nature, citizenship, etc. enact a cultural politics because the meanings that they attach to those concepts seek to redefine social power in either explicit or implicit ways.
interests intersected and led me to focus on the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* as the object of this study. I specifically detail the context and events that led to the production of this research and I narrate my experiences “in the field” in Argentina both prior to the design of this research project and during the process of data collection. I believe this is important to position the research and to position myself as a researcher. My main goal is to show that the place that this research occupies in the context of contemporary research in human geography cannot be separated from both my position as a researcher and as an individual with a particular personal history and identity(ies). I also discuss the data collection process and the methods for analysis by situating my study in relation to previous research on the collection and analysis of data for the analysis of social movements networks.

In the final section of the chapter I present a broad, relational framework for the analysis of social movements from a geographic perspective. Drawing on current relational views of place and space, I offer a spatialized conception of social networks that critically synthesizes network theory, research on social movements, and the literature on the spatiality of collective action. This framework serves as the conceptual background for my examination of the historic and contemporary network geographies of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* that I pursue in the rest of the study.

Chapter 3 entails the first part of my analysis of the spatiality of the *Madres*, specifically to explain the sustainability and duration of their activism. Thus in this chapter I focus on the historical development and duration of the *Madres’* network. My goal is to show the ways in which the emotional foundations of the *Madres’* network—built around shared feelings of motherhood and friendship—have been crucial for the
emergence, cohesion, and sustainability of the Madres as a community of activists that has extended geographically across Argentina over time. Moreover, I show that the development of a network based on emotional relations among the Madres allowed them to remain embedded in a geographically disparate social movement community that has never been place-bound.

The empirical objective in Chapter 3 is closely related to the theoretical goal I pursue in this chapter, which is to shed further light on the geographic dimensions of processes of embeddedness. Specifically, geographers to date have shown that processes of embeddedness are often place-based and many times place-dependent. I argue, instead, that by analyzing the cognitive and emotional dimensions of network relations, other geographies that are not readily discernible obtain. Through a cultural perspective on the analysis of social networks and by empirically grounding such a perspective through an analysis of the emotional dimensions of the Madres' network, I show how embeddedness for the Madres has been a geographically flexible network process strategic to organizational survival. I suggest that the findings in this chapter have profound implications for understanding cohesion as a socio-spatial processes and conclude by arguing that an examination of non-material patterns and processes of social networks is useful to reveal a more nuanced understanding of the geography of embeddedness.

Chapter 4 continues analyzing the continuity and cohesion of the Madres' network. My goal here is to focus on other symbolic spatial elements that have contributed to the sustained cohesion of the Madres across Argentina over the years. The main focus of the chapter is on the symbolic relation that the Madres have developed with specific plazas across Argentina. My main point in this chapter is that places have
an important function in maintaining cohesion in social networks even when networks are not localized but are, instead, geographically extensive or dispersed. By analyzing the ways in which, over the years, the Madres' have utilized public plazas and have made the gathering in public plazas one of the main components of their activism, I show how the continuity of the Madres' struggle has been dependent on their symbolic identification with a place.

I construct my argument in this chapter by offering a synthesis of the social movement and geography literature that deals with the relations between activism and sites of resistance. I develop new insights from these two bodies of literature by understanding collective acts of public activism and disruption as intentional public performances that connect activists to different audiences and places. I then situate such insights in relation to my ethnographic research on the Madres' public activism. Understanding the Madres' public activism as performances allows me to argue that the Madres' gatherings in plazas across Argentina have become, over time, collective rituals or collective performances, and that through the practice of such place-based collective performances the Madres' have maintained network cohesion and social symbolic proximity despite physical distance. Continuing with the theme of the previous chapter and consistent with the idea of the Madres as an imagined community, I conclude by arguing that the Madres' collective performances in plazas across Argentina show that localization is not always necessary to sustain communal bonds. Furthermore, at a more general level, the analysis of the Madres' performances in this chapter reaffirms the understanding of "place" as open and relational, along the lines of current thinking in critical human geography.

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In Chapter 5, I leave the theme of unity and cohesion aside and instead focus on issues of conflict and division in the Madres' networks. I focus on the geographic dimensions of conflict and inter-organizational rivalry among the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. I continue analyzing the Madres' public activism in plazas as public performances as I did in the previous chapter. My interest here, however, is to look at the Madres' performances in public places as the embodiment of conflict. I do so specifically by analyzing the different discourses and practices regarding human rights and the politics and landscapes of memory that are embodied in the Madres' performances. The chapter builds on the geographies of commemoration literature, extending the scope of inquiry to consider the multiple spatial scales through which the “politics of memory” unfold. I focus on an analysis of the struggles over the creation of memorial landscapes that emerge from the intricate ways in which representations of the past and the Madres' identity politics intersect.

Specifically, I analyze the current competing strategies for memory of two different groups of Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Their strategies underscore geographic dimensions of the politics of memory as they clash over how to “appropriately place” memory in the landscape and over the “acceptable” and “effective” spatial scales through which remembering should take place. Whereas one group emphasizes making visible the events of the past to promote transmission of memory to other generations and to remember and honor those who disappeared, the other group focuses on re-interpreting symbols from the past in an attempt to encourage future activism. I show how such conflicting strategies manifest spatially in a variety of ways, ranging from the creation of physical markers (such as monuments, plaques, murals, and graffiti) to the performance
of collective rituals that center on the *Madres'* bodies as *sites* for either commemoration of the past or *platforms* for future activism. Moreover, the strategies are also enacted at different spatial scales, ranging from the body of individual *Madres* to different elements of the urban environment. In the conclusion of this chapter I highlight the way in which different spatialities contribute to validate or condemn competing politics of memory and commemoration. I also suggest ways in which geographers can begin thinking about landscapes of memory through a more relational and "networked" understanding of space, scale, and place.

In Chapter 6 I return to analyzing the *Madres'* networks formally. I focus concretely on some of the *Madres'* more explicit goals: to gather sufficient resources to effectively sustain their struggle for truth and justice regarding the past human rights violations in Argentina. Rather than directing attention to the *Madres'* interpersonal connections (as I do on Chapters 3, 4, and 5), I focus here on their inter-organizational connections. I specifically examine how the construction of networks that have operated at a variety of spatial scales has allowed the *Madres* to access resources that are important for sustaining mobilization strategies. I emphasize the patterns of both visible and less tangible network relations that the *Madres* have established with other groups. Towards this end, I draw from formal theories of social networks in economic sociology and apply the concept of *network bridges* geographically. Further, I also draw from the literature on collective action frames to show how the *Madres* used symbolic depictions of the plazas as a strategy to build and sustain network connections with different groups.
Finally, to conclude, Chapter 7 offers a combined discussion of the spatiality of the Madres' activism that I discussed throughout the study. My goal here is to highlight the connections among all of the Madres' dimensions of their activism (from the more implicit goals of cohesion to the more explicit goals of obtaining resources for mobilizations) from a geographic perspective. My argument is that by analyzing the interrelation of all of the Madres' dimensions of activism (from the practice of public performances to the establishment of strategic trans-local networks) it is possible to better understand the significance of their activism relative to other social movements.

I suggest that what is significant about the Madres is that even in the face of conflict they have been able to sustain their activities through the development of geographically flexible networks. I argue that the flexibility of the Madres' networks facilitated the negotiation of conflict and prevented the dissolution of the group, and that the flexibility of their inter-organizational relations allowed them to successfully organize nationally and transnationally. I suggest that the concept of geographic flexibility provides a useful template for studies of the duration and continuity of collective action.

I conclude by arguing that my analysis of the Madres' activism is significant because it allows for a close examination of the role of spatiality in assessing the effectiveness of social movements. Specifically, I argue that my analysis of the Madres can be understood as an examination of mobilization outcomes of social movements. Moreover, I suggest that my focus on the spatiality of mobilization outcomes fills a void in both geographic and sociological research on social movements that typically avoid making general statements about the implications of research findings relative to the wide range of possible social movement outcomes. I argue that my study of the spatiality of the
*Madres* activism over time is a platform for more research on collective action seeking to further assess how different degrees of social movement effectiveness relate to different dimensions of the spatialities of collective action.
CHAPTER 2

NEGOTIATING PERSONAL AND THEORETICAL POSITIONS

2.1-The fieldwork experience: neither insider nor outsider

When I first left my native Argentina at the end of 1992 for the United States, I thought I was only going to be abroad for six months. My trip to the United States was part of a student exchange program sponsored by the university I attended in Buenos Aires. I was supposed to return to Argentina to finish my undergraduate degree after my study abroad experience. However, six months in the United States soon turned into a year, then two years, then an undergraduate degree, then another year, then graduate school. Eight years later I found myself writing a dissertation proposal in Columbus, Ohio, that, if approved and funded, would take me back to Argentina for a stay of over six months. Things had been reversed. In the eight years that I had been in the United States, I had never been out of the country for more than a month at a time. I had returned to Argentina only to visit family during Christmas holidays, for short periods of time. Now, as it had happened eight years ago, I was planning on leaving the country where I had been living most of my adult life to go back to Argentina to conduct research for an extended period of time. I wondered...what would happen?
These biographical comments may seem odd for a study of the geographic dimensions of The Madres de Plaza de Mayo, but they are quite relevant to the research process. As I have already indicated in the introduction, ever since I was in high school in Argentina, I have always admired the tenacity of the Madres and I have followed their trajectories. Even before I had decided to conduct research on the Madres, and as a result of my interest in the issue of human rights in Latin America in general, I kept a small file with newspaper clippings about them.

In the “Data Collection” section of my dissertation proposal, I explained that much of my data collection methodology would be based on ethnographic and archival methods. Accordingly, I emphasized my optimal qualifications for conducting individual and group interviews and participant observation with the Madres in several places across Argentina. I have much background knowledge about the Madres and I believed my qualifications were optimal because, after all, I was a native Argentine who spoke flawless Argentine Spanish. I also knew how to navigate the huge Buenos Aires metropolitan area (the city where I would collect most the data for this study) and I could travel around the country with ease. Having grown up in Argentina, I also knew the many idiosyncratic attitudes of the porteños (the people from Buenos Aires) and thus I was sure that I would be able to deal with uncooperative public employees in libraries and archives, whom I was sure I was going to encounter. I also knew I would be able to work my way around the tantrums of other people who might be bothered by my research. I feared that this could include even my research subjects (the Madres and their collaborators and friends), but I was sure that I would be able to manage any uncomfortable situation with ease. After all, I was one of them.

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Yet, once I secured funding for this study and the time of my first of two trips to Argentina grew closer, I began experiencing a growing anxiety about the fieldwork experience. I realized that after eight years in the United States, I had become quite disconnected from my friends and family in Argentina, despite the weekly phone calls to my parents and the occasional e-mail exchanges with my old high school and neighborhood friends. I had become quite distant from what I had claimed I knew best. I worried that my extended geographic distance from Argentina would also translate into a cultural distance, and that this would interfere with the successful development of my research.

My worries were complemented by the fact that I had become immersed in my life in United States. On reflection, I realized that from the first day since my arrival in the United States, I had tried to (re) construct (as much as possible) a new self that would learn and incorporate those things that I enjoyed and admired about U.S. social life and culture while avoiding the many others that I disliked. I also retained some Argentine identity traits that gave me a sense of security in a foreign land. Many of my best friends (by now most people living in the United States) joked that I had adopted so many “American” traits over the years that I acted more as an American than many other “real Americans” they knew. What started worrying me was whether I would be able to perform as a real Argentine in the field, something I was sure was necessary for the successful acquisition of the data I needed for my research.

I had reasons to believe that only somebody who was culturally close to the research subjects could do what I had set up to do in my research project. I was interested in the Madres as activists and people. As much as I could, I wanted to understand the
dynamics of the interpersonal relationships among the women who identify as Madres de Plaza de Mayo. I wanted to provide an account of the historical geography of the Madres’ networks from a unique perspective, centered on personal relations. As a geographer, I was interested in carrying out my research project by following M.L. Pratt’s (1998, pp. 431) advice to “...conceive social formations as constituted by (rather than in spite of) heterogeneity and to re-conceive social bonding as constituted by (rather than in spite of) difference”.

First, I wanted to understand the development and sustainability of the Madres’ interpersonal networks and try to bring to the surface the kinds of personal relations and individual and collective practices that have contributed to sustain the networks over time. I wanted to pay particular attention to the role that the strategic and symbolic meanings that the Madres attach to particular places (such as the Plaza de Mayo, where they met and gathered over the years) have had for the sustainability of their groups. I also wanted to pay particular attention to the personal and subjective experiences of the activists.

I knew that these dimensions were as relevant to the sustainability of collective action as are any kind of material resources or strategic connections with other groups that facilitate mobilization. I was (and still am) convinced by Taylor and Rupp’s (2001) argument about the mobilization of activists. According to them, much of the process of mobilization are performed by activists as “emotional labor”, usually involving “...channeling, transforming, legitimating and managing one’s own and others’ emotions and expressions of emotions in order to cultivate and nurture the social networks that are the building blocks of social movements” (Taylor and Rupp, 2001). Thus my fieldwork
required getting to know individual *Madres* at a more personal level, attempting to avoid reifying them as the collective noun “*Madres*”. I wanted them to share with me details of a history that is as much about the struggle for human rights as it is about shared emotions, friendship, and rivalry among members and between the two largest *Madres’* organizations.

Second, I wanted to trace the historical and geographical development of the *Madres’* inter-personal and inter-organizational networks to empirically document and ground my ideas about the importance of geographically differentiated network relations in the sustainability and effectiveness of collective action. This required accessing organizational records (such as minutes of meetings, memoranda, diaries, newsletters, personal and organizational correspondence) that were only available from the *Madres* themselves. Because the two largest *Madres’* organizations are still active, they keep their own archives, and this information is unavailable from conventional data archives in major sources such as the National Library and the Library of Congress. Obtaining this information required gaining the trust of *Madres* in both organizations. I was particularly concerned with my ability to access this information from one of the groups of *Madres*, the *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, well known for prohibiting researchers from accessing their archives (see Bickford, 2000).

I had personally met a few of the *Madres of the Plaza de Mayo* in one of my short visits to Argentina during Christmas of 1996. Motivated by my recent immersion on the literature on social movements, I had already begun exploring the possibility of doing research on the *Madres*. At that time, I went to Argentina without any of the anxiety I later developed, when I traveled back to conduct the actual fieldwork. But it was in that
first preliminary trip where I began realizing that conducting "the fieldwork" would be more challenging than I ever thought it would be. My interactions during my first trip consisted in attending a number of the Madres' weekly walks in the Plaza de Mayo, where I asked them about their willingness of talking to me more extensively about their activists' lives in my next trip. I also visited the offices of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo to ask whether they would allow me to access their archives and retrieve historical organizational documentation that is not available elsewhere.

The problem was not the Madres per se. Most of the women I met in my first trip were very open and talkative. Overall, they responded to my questions with positive feedback and agreed that they would be willing to participate and collaborate in my research project. The unanticipated challenge for me was that the Madres wanted to know as much about me as I wanted to know about them. Despite my intellectual understanding of positionality, "situated knowledge" (Haraway, 1988) and the critique of ethnography (Clifford and Marcus, 1986) I was emotionally unprepared for the Madres' perceptions of me as a person. In that first visit, the Madres I talked with wanted to know a lot about my personal history. Who was I? Where was I from? Why was I studying in the United States? Why would I come back to talk to them? Why would a geographer want to talk to the Madres de Plaza de Mayo? I realized that, from the Madres' perspective, these questions made a lot of sense given the past incidents of people infiltrating the organization with disastrous consequences. Of course, I had submitted statements at Ohio State University regarding human subject research policy and regulations, yet, again, I was emotionally unprepared to be perceived as possibly operating against the interests of the Madres. Moreover, most of the Madres have always been critical of U.S. policy.
towards Latin America. While most of the women did not seem to be resentful towards U.S. citizens or U.S. "things" per se, the fact is that I was an Argentine who had left the country to be educated in the United States. One of the Madres asked me: "If you are so interested in human rights, why did you leave the country in the first place? Why did not you stay and attempt to make a difference from within?"

Their questions troubled me. They presented me with the uncertainty of how to define myself in front of the Madres. I realized that this issue would become crucial for the success of my research project. During my first trip, I soon realized that the Madres were used to talking to people in the Plaza de Mayo, in particular foreigners. In fact, the Madres of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, for example, seemed to have designated members (each of them somewhat fluent in a different language) who would always be called to answer questions about their history. Whenever somebody from the United States approached the Madres, one of the women would be called to come and answer the questions, in perfect English. Similarly, on another occasion, I heard one of the women ask a tourist: "Are you from the Netherlands? No problem. That woman over there will answer your questions. Her parents were Dutch, you know."

I realized that tourists were getting a lot of attention from the Madres, perhaps more than anybody else. After all, porteños were already used to seeing these women walking in the square every Thursday since they have been doing it for 23 years and most of them seemed to care little about them. Should I then pretend I was American, or Spanish, or Mexican, or something else? Would they be more interested in talking to me? Would that get me in their archives easier? I also realized that the Madres had a script that they repeatedly performed in their weekly marches. Time after time, I heard a
woman repeating the same story almost to perfection to curious Americans, British, Australians and South Africans in the Plaza de Mayo. Even the women who did not speak a foreign language and only talked to people who spoke or understood Spanish seemed to have been following a carefully crafted script. What would be the advantage, then, of pretending to be a citizen of the United States, Italy, or elsewhere? I would certainly catch their attention faster, but then I would hear the same story over and over. Plus, isn't it obvious that I am Argentine? Can they tell? Can I tell?

Perhaps this can explain the anxiety I experienced when I traveled to Argentina again in 1999 to conduct the actual fieldwork. During the stages of research design, I learned more about critical ethnographic research and I benefited from readings in research methods from feminist and post-colonial perspectives. I was engrossed in the idea of allowing the voices of the research subjects in the texts of my research, and even in the development of research questions in the first place (McDowell and Sharp, 1997). I was also aware that in a critical ethnographic approach to research, the researcher is the primary "instrument" of research because the method draws on resources of connection and understanding with the research subjects (Stacey, 1997). However, this awareness came with the recognition that the appearance for greater equality with research subjects—characteristic of critical ethnography—can also mask different forms of exploitation such as manipulation or betrayal by the ethnographer (Stacey, 1997). I immediately recalled my earlier thoughts about pretending to be somebody else to facilitate obtaining "data" and I felt ashamed of myself. Thus, I decided that I would be always truthful to my identity and my objectives during the fieldwork. I would introduce myself as an Argentine living and studying abroad, regardless of the consequences.
Soon after my fieldwork experience had started, however, I understood that it did not matter so much what I said about myself, but rather, what others thought of me. This was not just limited to the research subjects, but included a number of people whom I met during my stay in Argentina. From day one, I realized that my Spanish and even my appearance were no longer those of a typical porteño. My Spanish itself was affected by almost nine years abroad without using my native language on a regular basis and without being exposed to the peculiar words and cadence that are characteristic of the way porteños talk. This realization struck me one morning, as I was about to purchase a newspaper from a stand near my living quarters at a friend’s apartment in the “old city” part of Buenos Aires. I had been buying a paper every morning at the same newsstand for over a week. Each time I asked for the paper from the same man. Each time I bought the same alternative, left-leaning newspaper (a paper that does not have a wide circulation but that was useful for me because it publishes a section on human rights and often contains an agenda of events on human rights activities; this was one of my ways to find out about future Madres’ events around the country). As I asked for the paper again that morning, the man smiled and asked me: “You are not from here, right?” I smiled and was about to explain my situation when he went ahead, and without a pause, said: “I can tell that you are Spanish because of your accent; plus you buy this newspaper every day, and only young people from abroad who are in Buenos Aires buy this newspaper. Young people here don’t read this. It’s two pesos, thank you, have a good day”. I was perplexed and did not know what to say, so I simply smiled, paid, said thank you and left.
Similar situations arose many times during my visits and interviews with the Madres. Even though I explained to them who I was, where I was from, and other details about my life, many of them constructed their own history and background for me. One Madre also believed I was from Spain, even though I told her that I lived in the United States and I was Argentine. She was one of the first women I met from a group of Madres outside Buenos Aires and she introduced me or talked about me to several other Madres in her group as the “young man from Spain”. I did not have a choice. For this small group of Madres, I would be Spanish for the rest of my stay in Argentina.

The majority of the Madres acknowledged my Argentine background and nationality, but insisted in referring to me (jokingly) as “el yanqui” (yankee, the preferred Argentine word to describe somebody from the United States). When having conversations about any imaginable issue with the Madres, the women always insisted in making comparisons between the way things work or are for me there (in the United States) and for them here (in Argentina). Things always ended up divided in distinctions between us and them. Many times, the Madres acknowledged that they enjoyed talking to me because I was a special kind of Argentine/Yanqui. According to them my “dual culture” made me interesting because I could actually understand what they were telling me about the situation in the country (the idea is that you can only understand Argentina if you are Argentine; this is a shared notion among a lot of people in the country) yet I looked and acted differently than any other “young man” in Argentina.

I also enjoyed an unexpected advantage in my relationship with many of the Madres. Several women opened up to me easily because my appearance, my interests, and even my age reminded them of their disappeared sons. Many of the women adopted a
maternal attitude towards me, asking me about my personal life and giving me advice on a wide variety of subjects. Many of them cried when we talked about their missing children, and we shared short moments filled with strong emotions that I had never anticipated.

What was interesting about the situations that develop around my identity is that I began feeling that the *Madres* (and everybody else) were right about me. As the fieldwork proceeded, I kept feeling like a “hybrid” or a “conceptual anomaly” (Kondo, 1990). The more I thought about it and the more I tried to correct my Spanish and my demeanors, the more apparent it became that I would probably have to stay in Argentina much longer before I could become “normal” again. In some situations or contexts (e.g., when I visited my parents and was in familiar territory) I felt very Argentine, as if I had never left the country. Yet, so many other times (e.g. when I met new people, when I talked to some of the *Madres*, when I dealt with public employees at the national library) I felt different because *they* saw me differently. And I acted differently in different contexts, depending on where I was and whom I was with. Thinking about my hybridity helped me to recognize the women I intended to “study” expressed multiple identities themselves (e.g., mothers, grandmothers, wives, teachers, doctors, activists, activists from different organizational affiliation). Moreover, I realized that the *Madres* had expressed and used their different identities *strategically* at times (Berstein, 1996). This is elaborated in detail in chapter 5.

I present these memories and personal impressions of the fieldwork experience because I believe they are crucial to understanding the end result, the final text of this study. This anecdotal discussion is useful to make a simple but important point: my
research on the historical geography of the Madres' social networks has been molded and shaped by my experiences in the field, by the questions I asked (and the way I asked them) and by the answers I received, by my perceptions of the Madres and by their perceptions of me. As Kondo (1990) explains with regards to any ethnographic account, all stories are partial and located and screened through the narrator's eye/I, and all theories are embedded in the practice of the ethnographic inquiry. This study is no different.

2.2-Collecting/assembling “the data”

2.2.1 Archival research

Archival research was crucial to the foundations of the project because one of my goals was to reconstruct the historical geography of the emergence, evolution, and sustainability of the Madres' networks. Tracing the historical geography of this network required attention to different types of relations, such as relations of friendship among the women that gave rise to interpersonal networks, or strategic connections among activists and other groups that facilitated mobilization and gave rise to inter-organizational networks.

For the archival research, I relied mostly on documentation that belongs to the different groups of Madres. This data collection methodology has been utilized in prior historic analysis of social movement (Rosenthal et. al; 1985; Whittier, 1991). Diani and Eyerman (1992) have argued that other documentary sources, such as newspapers, are not a good source to obtain information about the activities of social movements or to reconstruct social movement networks because reports often lack detail. Fortunately, I
had access to the archives of the two largest Madres organizations in their offices in Buenos Aires (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Madres de Plaza de Mayo - Línea Fundadora). I also had access to the archives in the offices of one of the local chapters of Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo in the city of La Plata. Activists from a small and informal group of Madres in the city of Lomas de Zamora and in the city of Rosario (province of Santa Fe) also provided me with documents from their personal collections that were useful to complement the information I obtained from the largest archives.

The Buenos Aires archives of the two Madres’ organizations contain almost all of the existing documents that provide evidence of the beginning years of the Madres, documentation that is unavailable elsewhere. Many of these documents are unique. Some of them have not seen the light in years and have been inaccessible to researchers because of the unwillingness of the Madres to open their archives to researchers. In the case of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, accessing the archives proved to be a challenging task. It took me over two months of informal conversations with different Madres, participation in their weekly marches, and becoming closer to some of the women before I was allowed to peruse the archives. Once I was allowed, I discovered a wealth of documentation that was critical to trace the historical development of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. The Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo retained all of the earlier documents about the organization of the group. These include organizational newsletters produced by the Madres and illegally distributed among members, friends and activists.
during the military government (1976 to 1983), the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo
newspaper for the period 1985 to 2000 (of limited but legal circulation), and
organizational and personal correspondence, and scrapbooks dating back to 1976.

I accessed the archives of Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Línea Fundadora much
easier because the women in this group were more willing to cooperate and were
interested in a research project that sought to clarify differences and different trajectories
between the two Madres' organizations. Their archives did not contain documentation
about the earlier period of the Madres, but were crucial to obtain information about the
division of the original group of Madres in 1986 and the activities and relations of
Madres-Linea Fundadora from that year to the present. Most of the archival research
consisted in examining boxes of personal and organizational, correspondence, faxes,
newspaper clippings, minutes from meetings and fliers and publicity material. The task
was initially daunting because the Madres in this group are just beginning to organize
their archives, and most of the documents were in disorder. I spent many hours at their
offices going through documents; actually this proved to be an excellent opportunity to
meet the women and ask questions about the information I was trying to uncover. The
women shared stories about their past and I learned things about the group that I would
have never known to ask during interviews (see below).

In conducting the archival research, I looked for specific information. First, I
wanted to reconstruct the evolution of the community of Madres across Argentina—
where, when and how different groups of Madres formed. As I show in Chapter 3, the
archival records were the basis for the reconstruction of the historical geography of the
Madres' interpersonal network because it allowed me to have a record of all the localities
where the Madres had chapters or informal groups in the past. I complemented these data with information I elicited through intensive interviews with members and informants, described below.

Second, I wanted to reconstruct the overall pattern of the Madres' inter-organizational connections. Establishing the overall pattern of the Madres' connections with other activists and groups was a first step towards my goal of uncovering the processes underlying the sustainability of a territorially widespread community and of the effectiveness of the Madres in their mobilization strategies. For example, by reconstructing the overall structure and patterns of the network, I could then move on to investigate whether and how individual activists or groups of Madres have established local, regional, and transnational strategic connections with other groups that contributed to sustain the network over time.

Throughout my analysis of the documents, I followed Diani and Eyerman's (1992) methodology for establishing patterns of interactions among actors in social movement networks based on archival data. Accordingly, I inferred connections among Madres and other groups of activists or institutions if I found records that indicated they had jointly promoted specific actions or if they had exchanged information or other kinds of resources on a regular basis for an extended period of time, (e.g. a year or more). The newsletters and newspapers of the Madres as well as faxes and other organizational correspondence contained detailed information on all the contacts, support from, and actions with, other groups that the Madres have had over their history. These newsletters and newspapers proved to be a rich source of information for the project. For example, I was able to estimate the frequency of interaction of the Madres with other groups by
specifically searching for information that described joint activities such as public demonstrations or other forms of cooperation or participation in consultative committees. Accounting for flows of resources (whether monetary or of another kind) was more difficult, but many of the documents contained information that indicated resource transfers, such as work of volunteers and monetary donations from groups abroad.

I also completed my archival database of network formation and interactions with information I obtained firsthand from the Madres during the extent of the fieldwork. Specifically, during many of the public activities in which I participated (described below), some of the Madres delivered speeches on topics ranging from the Madres’ positions on current issues related to advances and setbacks in the struggle for truth and justice of past human rights violations to open criticism of other human rights groups or even of other groups of Madres. I tape recorded and transcribed these speeches because they provided first hand, primary information about the organizational differences and rivalries between the two largest Madres organizations. They were also useful in establishing the current patterns of interaction of the different groups of Madres with other activists and social movements. I then often asked members to comment on the speeches, seeking to elicit their reactions and personal opinions on the different subjects.

Finally, I also used published primary materials such as books written by women who participated in Madres, transcripts of speeches given by Madres in the past years, and narratives by Madres (many of them who are not longer alive). I obtained most of these documents in the archives of the two Madres’ organizations in Buenos Aires and from the personal collections of some of the women I interviewed. This documentation complements the data I obtained through the interviews, participant observation, and the
archival research that was more focused on establishing the patterns of the networks. Similarly, I also draw from secondary sources of previous studies of the Argentine human rights movement in general and of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo more specifically.\textsuperscript{6} These publications were useful to provide background information for the analysis and to situate my research in the largest context of the struggle for human rights in Argentina.

2.2.2 Ethnographic research

Although the data I obtained from documents allowed me to establish the general patterns of interaction between individual activists and groups, the historical data were, however, insufficient to capture the subjective dimensions of the actors’ interactions over time, such as how activists felt about each other and about their relationships. This problem has been recognized by social movement scholars interested in social movement networks (Diani, 1992) as one of the drawbacks of trying to establish the historic extent of networks. I was interested in understanding how women used particular places in cities, such as plazas, for their weekly activities and for their larger mobilizations. I also wanted to find out the meanings that the women attached to the plazas and other places and how their individual and collective subjective experiences of “place” related to the construction and sustainability of the networks of personal relations that shaped and sustained collective action. For these reasons, documentary evidence needed to be combined with information gathered from participant observation and interviews.

\textsuperscript{6} I obtained these documents in the “Collective Memory Project” library at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) and in the Argentine National Library, also in Buenos Aires.
2.2.2.1 Participant observation

Every week during the duration of my fieldwork in Argentina, I joined the Madres in their weekly silent marches. The majority of the marches I participated in took place in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires every Thursday at 3:30 in the afternoon. These events, which I analyze in detail in chapters 4 and 5, are crucial to understanding the sustainability of the Madres as a social movement community as well as the conflicts between the two Madres' organizations. Most of the time I talked to one or more of the Madres during the marches; sometimes I walked with them in silence. Participating in the weekly marches in the plazas gave me a sense of the importance of this practice for Madres and allowed me to get to know many of the women personally.

Many of my conversations and interactions with the Madres also started before and after the events in the plazas. Many times I walked with different Madres on their way to the Plaza de Mayo from their offices, talking about current events and the latest developments in terms of the struggle for truth and justice of past human rights violations in Argentina. Sometimes I accidentally ran into individual activists on the subway or train; these were also nice opportunities for spontaneous conversations that provided critical information regarding their activities.

Cafés also proved to be an important site for my research. The “café culture” is well established in Argentina; in Buenos Aires, for example, it is hard to walk a block in without finding a coffee house. The Madres usually went for coffee after their walks in the plaza. Therefore, on some occasions, I shared a cup of coffee with some of the Madres and continued conversations that had started in the plaza. Also during my stay in Buenos Aires, the Madres of the Asociación opened their own “literary café” in the same
building where their offices are located. The Madres' café is run by a group of young volunteers and it is a place frequented by a variety of publics, from office workers on lunch break to students, artists, and intellectuals (see Chapter 7). I visited the café often, both to conduct more archival research (the café has a small library of books and documents ranging on subjects from the history of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo to critical analysis of contemporary Argentine politics) and also to talk to the Madres who sometimes were there sharing a cup of coffee or tea. All these informal and often accidental conversations in subways, trains, cafés, and the street further cemented my relationship with the Madres and facilitated my understanding of the nature and characteristics of their activism.

I also visited Madres de Plaza de Mayo in the cities of La Plata, Lomas de Zamora, and Mar del Plata (all places where the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo has local chapters) to participate in their weekly public activities. Each local chapter had particular, interesting characteristics. For example, as a result of age and the small number of activists (only four) in Lomas de Zamora, the women in this group do not hold the weekly marches anymore. Instead, the Madres in this city set up a small kiosk at the street market in front of the main square in town every Sunday. Here, among street vendors, artisans and painters and a carrousel for children, the Madres patiently await for people interested to stop by, chat for while, and read the pamphlets and books they display. Therefore, I spent a Sunday afternoon with this group of Madres, sitting behind their kiosk, talking with them, sharing some mate, and watching them interact with
people who stopped by. This kind of participant observation was critical to get to know
women at a more personal level, and my understanding of many of the Madres' personal
experience of activism is the result of these experiences in the field.

2.2.2.2 Interviews

As a result of the different practices of different women in the different groups,
my interviews with women who identify as Madres de Plaza de Mayo took place in a
variety of settings and situations. I conducted 40 open-ended, semi-structured individual
and group interviews with Madres from different groups. I relied on my first initial
contacts for my first interviews, and then I identified other activists by snowballing from
participants in my initial interviews. The weekly marches in the plazas allowed me to
meet additional women activists and arrange for additional interviews. My goal was to
interview women whose shared experiences, solidarities, and strategic actions bound
them together as Madres de Plaza de Mayo and legitimated their participation in
collective action (Taylor and Whittier, 1992 and Snow et al., 1986). Therefore, I did not
limit myself to interviewing women who belonged to the two formal Madres' organizations because, as indicated, some women identify themselves as Madres de Plaza de Mayo even though they are not formally recognized as “official” Madres de Plaza de Mayo by leaders of the organizations (the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, for example, strongly draws boundaries among different “types” of Madres).

I conducted 20 interviews with women from Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 17 interviews with women from Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora and
3 interviews with independent Madres de Plaza de Mayo. The women I interviewed were
from six different cities in Argentina: Buenos Aires, Lomas de Zamora, La Plata, Ayacucho, and Mar del Plata (all in the province of Buenos Aires) and Rosario (in the province of Santa Fe). Almost all of the women I interviewed had been active Madres de Plaza de Mayo for over 20 years, indicating that they have been activists since the time of the last military dictatorship. Some of these women were among the original and founding members of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Only two of the women I interviewed identified themselves as Madres de Plaza de Mayo for a shorter time span (15 years); these two women joined the groups after Argentina returned to a democratically elected government in 1983.

The interviews were open-ended and the women provided information about the history of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and about organizational differences and changes as well as about their own personal experiences as activists. Most of the interviews were conducted either in the offices of the two Madres organizations in Buenos Aires or in the Plaza de Mayo before or after one of the weekly marches, as I indicated above. In addition I traveled to La Plata, Lomas de Zamora, and Mar del Plata to interview women who rarely came to Buenos Aires. Six of the interviews were group interviews where a minimum of two and a maximum of six women participated. On average, the interviews lasted about an hour: the longest interviews lasted 3 and half hours and the shortest lasted half an hour. All interviews were conducted in Spanish, tape recorded, and then transcribed in full. In compliance with the requirements of the exemption from Human Subjects Institutional Review Board connected to the data collection portion of this study, the names of individuals interviewed have been withheld throughout this study.
2.3- Methods: problematizing network analysis

Throughout the study, I take a qualitative approach to the data analysis to best capture the complexity of the historical geography of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. This approach to data analysis is different from previous analyses of social movement networks. Most analyses of social networks are often grounded empirically through quantitative analysis, usually using measures and formulas specifically designed to detect the frequency of network interactions. Quantitative analysis of social networks, therefore, are useful to document network structures and patterns.7 Regarding social movements, quantitative analysis of social movement networks have rendered revealing insights regarding the relation between network structures and the different mobilization strategies of groups of activists and the sustainability of social movements.

For example, Rosenthal et al. (1985) used a quantitative approach in an analysis of the relations among 19th century women reform leaders in New York State. The findings of that study showed that ties among women leaders sustained the movement and that links with other organizations were critical not just for their mobilization but also for the development of a larger women's movement.

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7 For example, social connections in a network are generally measured as the density of a network, or a proportion that is calculated as the number of all ties divided by the number of all possible ties (Knoke and Kuklinski, 1982). Relative to social movements, density measures have been considered as a rough indicator of a social movement organization's willingness to cooperate with other ones. Centrality is another measure commonly used to indicate social connectivity. It refers to the position that single actors occupy in a network, and is often measured by calculating “...the number of relations received by an actor from all others in the network” (Knoke and Kuklinski, 1982). In the context of a network of social movement organizations, centrality has been interpreted as the capacity of a social movement organization to attract support from other groups and organizations (Diani, 1992).
My goal in this study, however, is to explain the processes behind the formation and sustainability of the social networks that bind the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. Epistemologically, this task requires a qualitative approach. Previous network analyses of social movements have already shown that patterns of relationship among activists and among social movement organizations (e.g., among individual *Madres* or between the *Asociación Madres* and *Madres-Línea Fundadora*) are often a matter of the subjective evaluations on the part of the actors involved (Diani, 1995). Such subjective dimensions cannot be “measured” in quantitative terms since such measures tend to mask the causal effects of beliefs, emotions, and values of those involved (see detailed discussion of this issue in chapter 3).

Thus, in this study I investigate and ground more “abstract” theoretical concepts that I discuss in the next chapters (such as “embeddedness” [chapter 3] or “network bridges” [chapter 6]) by analyzing the narratives I obtained through interviews and participant observation and by relying on historical data I obtained through archival research. I have done this by organizing data from archives, interviews, and participant observations using QSR NUD*IST Vivo, a qualitative data analysis software that facilitates browsing, searching, linking, and coding diverse qualitative data documents in a single platform. I have used the software to link and code data from different sources into both broad and specific analytical categories; these categories emerged out the intersection of the cross-disciplinary framework that guides this study and the empirical observations obtained during the fieldwork.

This qualitative approach to the data analysis is also crucial to the overall geographic perspective that guides this research. A qualitative approach allows me to
show how the geographic aspects of social networks, for example, are fluid and multidimensional, and that a particular process can be understood geographically in multiple ways (recall my previous discussion of the different “geographic perspectives” in chapter 1). For example, the geographic dimensions of the Madres’ activism go beyond the representation of points, connections, and patterns of interactions of their networks on a map. Maps are an important way to document the geographic extent of phenomena (e.g., in chapters 3 and 6 I use maps and schematics to chart the Madres’ networks), but other processes (such as social cohesion) can also be explained from a geographic perspective if data are interpreted and analyzed from a qualitative perspective. For example, as I show in chapter 4, my analysis of the Madres’ narratives reveals the relations between the way women experience their activities in the plazas and their feeling of proximity towards each other. Similarly, in Chapter 5 I also approach the issue of conflict among the Madres from a qualitative perspective by interpreting the Madres’ weekly rituals in the plazas from a “performance” perspective (i.e., understanding the activities of the Madres as a social drama [Turner, 1992]). This perspective, which in different forms is gathering momentum in the cultural analysis of social movements (see Taylor and Whittier, 1995; Rupp and Taylor, 2002), allows me to show how the Madres’ conflicts become materialized in the urban landscape of cities across Argentina and how the Madres are involved in the construction of competing “landscapes of memory”.

2.4-Positioning theory and developing a framework for analysis

Developing a theoretical framework for this study has also given me a more critical view of the variety of positions that I could adopt in relation to different academic
audiences and academic cultures. As during my fieldwork experience, in which I often negotiated my position as insider/outsider, establishing a conceptual framework for this study has involved working through a number of disciplinary boundaries and academic vocabularies. Therefore, this study has to be situated within the context of its production: the overall result is a reflection of my own position as a geographer and social scientist. Acknowledging this position is crucial to understanding the place that this study occupies in the context of the discipline of human geography today.

As I explained in Chapter 1, there are multiple ways of posing geographic questions and of addressing a problem from a geographic perspective because geography is a broad discipline. In this study, I take “spatiality” as my central mode of geographic inquiry: my main concern is with an analysis of the spatiality of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. This concern with the spatiality of social life is not new to this study. Spatiality has become an important focus of geographic inquiry in the past two decades, as geographers argued for research that shows the inseparability and mutual constitution of the social and the spatial. Along these lines, geographers and other scholars in the social sciences and humanities began analyzing the relations between space and society through a variety of problems and situations. This has given rise to the “spatial turn” in the understanding of social, cultural, economic, and ecological dimensions of life that I

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8 Moreover, the focus on space-society relations is related to geographers’ more traditional emphasis on the study of space and spatial organization as fundamental variables that influence the operation of individuals’ behavior and of society’s organization (see Taffee, 1974). Even though this perspective has been often associated with the spatial quantitative revolution in geography, recognition of the importance of the “spatial” was already implicit in much of human geography from the early 1900s (see, for example, Mckinder, 1907).
described in Chapter 1. Such a focus on space-society relations is an ongoing geographic project and a mode of inquiry that is not tied to any one single ontological or epistemological commitment but that can be pursued from a variety of perspectives. For example, early research on space-society relations was inspired by Marxist and humanist approaches, whereas in recent years much geographic research has been approached from feminist and several "post" perspectives (e.g., post-structural, post-colonial, to name a few). While a focus on space-society relations is by no means the most common approach to conducting geographic research today, I see this study as part of an emerging body of research on the spatiality of phenomena.

Furthermore, the cross-disciplinary way in which I approach my analysis of the geographic dimensions of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo is different from many studies in contemporary human geography because, despite claims that a spatial turn has taken place across the social sciences, there has not been much cross-disciplinary integration. This has happened despite geographers' persistent calls to re-think theories from other disciplines from an explicitly geographic perspective and to "...tease out how their use within an explicit geographical theorizing may modify or develop them" (Massey et al., 1999, 7). In this study I have attempted to respond to such calls by bridging across disciplines, showing what a geographic perspective can contribute to other disciplines or theories (such as sociology or social movement theory).

So where does this study stand? I believe that this question can be answered in two parts. First, this study draws from contemporary research on critical urban, political, cultural, and economic geography that relates to the analysis of social movements and space-society relations. Moreover, the study has been influenced by research relevant to
the issues I address from a number of disciplines. For example, as the framework for analysis that I present in the next session and throughout this study will show, much of the conceptual background on networks draws from work in economic geography and sociology. Furthermore, my interests in the more intimate and relational dimensions of social movements has been influenced by the recent "cultural politics" approach to the study of social movements followed by a variety of scholars, including some geographers.

Second, despite my explicit crossing of borders (across disciplines, across academic contexts, and across paradigms) and my integration of both cultural and social theory, I approach this study primarily as a geographer. My goals are to focus on the spatiality of the _Madres de Plaza de Mayo_ and as a result I have tried to make a geographic perspective visible and relevant throughout the study. I achieve this by thinking critically about the spatiality of the _Madres_’ activism. Thinking critically about space-society relations means that I have attempted to avoid extreme positions in my treatment of “space” as it pertains to my research project. On the one hand, this means that I treat and conceptualize the spatial always in relation to the social so as not to give space causal powers, thus avoiding the spatial fetishism characteristic of the early days of the spatial revolution in geography [see Sayer, 1985}). On the other hand, a critical consideration of the spatial means that I carefully choose the spatial vocabulary and metaphors that I invoke because I recognize that the specific and contested conceptions of space that a spatial vocabulary and spatial metaphors embody often have unintended political consequences (see Smith and Katz, 1993, 68).
I believe these comments about the position of my research are important to understand this study overall because both my position and my work are inseparable and feed off of each other. Overall, I have worked by selecting literatures from different perspectives and my intention has been to develop a study that is built more in terms of integration of ideas and concepts rather than as a critique of silences in particular disciplines. This has been hard to achieve, and I realize that in many parts of this study I still discuss particular issues in terms of "geographers", "sociologists", etc. Still, my question has always been: what exactly can one learn about the duration of social movements (and about the trajectory of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo specifically) by working from such a cross-disciplinary perspective? How does one approach the research problem, conceptually, from a geographic perspective? Below I suggest one possible avenue to begin answering this question.

2.5-A framework for analysis

2.5.1 Relational thinking and social movement networks

Over the past three decades, scholarly work on collective action has shown that attention to social networks is critical to understanding the development of social movements. Specifically, scholars have pointed out that thinking about collective action in terms of networks of social relations avoids reifying social movements (i.e., it avoids reducing social movements to homogeneous or "concrete" entities) and contributes to achieving a better understanding of the practices that enable collective action in the first place (Pratt M.L., 1998). Much of the work that has followed this premise has emphasized the role of interpersonal networks of daily life that revolve around both
physical and social locations (such as neighborhood, community, ethnicity, sexuality, etc.) in providing meaning and purpose to practices of collective action (Melucci, 1989; Mitchell, 1995; Cresswell, 1996; Alvarez et al., 1998)

At the same time, and taking notice of the increased interconnectedness between societies in the current context of globalization and transnationalism, scholars have also begun defining contemporary social movements as transnational networks and have started to analyze how mobilizing activities are managed through webs of activists (Keck and Sikkink, 1996; Crugel, 1999; Boli and Thomas, 1999; Alvarez et al., 1998). Within this perspective and also working in the context of the globalization thesis, other scholars (most notably human geographers) have examined how effective strategies of mobilization occur through networking at a variety of spatial scales simultaneously (Herod, 1998; Miller, 2000; Castree, 2001).

I believe that two general notions about collective action emerge by integrating insights from these different lines of research. First, there is some agreement that the definition of social movements as networks is a useful conceptual tool to investigate how collective action depends on social relations embedded in webs of meaning and practice. Second, there is an inherent spatiality to social movement networks that ranges in scope from the locations and places that facilitate the practice of activism to the transnational webs that link activists together. And as many have shown, this spatiality makes a critical difference in the outcomes of purposive collective action.

Inasmuch as both these themes are present in contemporary research, work that addresses how the spatiality of social networks is embedded in social movement processes requires development. Although we know that different social movement
processes (e.g. recruitment, mobilization, continuity, etc.) are mediated and negotiated through networks with different spatialities, it remains unclear whether and how the spatiality of different relations in a network may actually affect the development of such social movement processes. This unresolved issue also speaks directly to the research questions I have posed regarding the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, because my goal is to analyze their continued activism with reference to the spatiality of the different connections and relations that have bound them together over the years.

I suggest that this question can be approached by building upon and integrating existing insights from different perspectives that, to date, remain discrete. The literature on social networks (developed most notably in U.S. economic sociology and often cited by economic geographers interested in social networks) is an excellent starting point. This literature is a broad and heterogeneous federation of perspectives that conceptualizes social structure in terms of a system of social relations (Scott, 1991; Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994). It includes analyses of social networks based on rational choice and utilitarian theories of action (Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 1980; Wasserman and Faust, 1994) as well as social constructionist conceptualizations of networks that define networks as contexts in which symbolic and cultural production takes place (Melucci, 1989; Ansell, 1997). Although the network literature is internally differentiated, its strength lies in one
of its underlying features: the emphasis on relations that enable and constrain the actions of those involved (Dicken et al., 2001). In other words, at issue are not the nodes or points in a network but the connections themselves.

Interestingly, such relational thinking has also been gaining more attention in contemporary human geography. Specifically, place and spatial scale are increasingly conceptualized as being open, porous, and networked, rather than as being fixed, essential, and hierarchical in nature (Swyngedouw, 1997; Massey, 1999a; Massey et al., 1999). Therefore, it is possible to think relationally not only about the character of contemporary collective action and about the different relations that bind activists together but also about the spatiality of the processes that generate activism at the outset.

Specifically, my suggestion is that there are some conceptual intersections among relational definitions of space and place, network approaches to collective action, and the relational mode of thinking intrinsic to the network perspective. My position is that it is possible to build upon existing insights to find points of connection and a common conceptual background. Epistemologically, I suggest thinking relationally is not just connections among nodes (e.g., places, people) but also about integrating relevant points from different conceptual frameworks to pose and address new questions (Ettlinger, 2001a). Relational thinking is also a way to bridge theories and disciplines.

Regarding the goals of this study, connecting different lines of research relationally permits achieving a more complete understanding of the complexity of

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9 Although Dicken et al. (2001) emphasize relations, their frame of reference is actor-network theory (ANT) and not the network theories developed by economic sociologists that I am discussing in this study.
several social movement processes. For example, network theory offers an interesting framework to analyze phenomena that have yet to be fully understood from a spatial perspective. Similarly, a spatial approach has the capacity to inform social movement and network theories by uncovering how spatiality is related to the constraining and enabling dimensions of relationships in a network.

2.5.2 Thinking geographically about social movement networks

In existing analyses of social movement networks, scholars identify at least three types of networks that are crucial for the existence of collective action: inter-personal networks of activists that facilitate recruitment and individual participation (McAdam, 1982; McCarthy and Zald, 1987; Klandermans and Oegema, 1987); links between individuals and organizations that are based on individuals’ multiple personal and group allegiances (della Porta and Diani, 1999); and inter-organizational networks used to coordinate actions and share resources that are crucial to achieve large scale mobilization (Rosenthal et al., 1985; Diani, 1992).

These different types of networks sometimes overlap, but they are not constituted by the same members and relations at all times. Members’ multiple allegiances result in a complex web of interactions among individual members and formal organizations, but distinct networks based on different types of relations and exchanges can still be discerned within the larger web. In the case of the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, for example, members are linked together through interpersonal networks based on strong emotional bonds. Interpersonal links are built around the recognition that each member is a mother struggling to find the truth about the disappearance of her son.
or daughter and to obtain legal punishment for those responsible for the crimes. In some cases, interpersonal bonds are also built and sustained around the idea of “socialized motherhood” (i.e. each mother is no longer the individual mother of a disappeared person; rather, each woman embodies the universe of all mothers of disappeared children, including those women who never turn into activists).

At the same time, members of Madres de Plaza de Mayo have links to other human rights groups and to other social movements because of strategic interests—and only in rare occasions as a result of emotional bonds or a shared group identity. Thus, over time, relations among activist Madres have developed into an interpersonal network based on strong emotional bonds and shared collective identity, and their contacts with other groups have developed into a series of inter-organizational networks based on strategic interests. Both types of networks are obviously intertwined because some Madres are part of both networks, but the processes that have formed and that keep them together differ.

The benefits of defining social movements in terms of different types of networks falls short of offering insightful analysis if we do not also recognize the different types of relations that are established through such linkages. Thus from the perspective of network theory, defining social movements as networks means viewing participants and their actions as interdependent and seeing ties among them as channels that allow the flow of both material and non-material resources. Furthermore, network theory instructs us that variation in the strength of relations or ties in a network is important in explaining the
dynamics of social processes (Granovetter, 1973, Burt, 1992). Distinguishing between different types of ties in the intertwined networks of social movements is also crucial to understand the sustainability of collective action. For example, attention to the development of interpersonal networks based on strong emotional bonds can shed light on the way activists need only rely on informal organizational structures (as opposed to formal social movement organizations) to sustain activism (Taylor and Whittier; 1992). Similarly, attention to relations among different groups can shed light on the way activists may rely on a formal social movement organization for particular types of strategic action. Thus, at issue in the analysis of social movement networks is how to identify the relationally differentiated effects of various types of linkages and the implications that their emerging patterns have for the outcomes of social movement activity. But a key question remains: how should we think about social movement networks and their spatiality simultaneously to gain better insights in our understanding of social movement processes?

I suggest that a better understanding of the effects of networks on the sustainability and duration of collective action can be obtained by conceptualizing social movements as networks of interactions among both activists and formal organizations—what Diani (1995) calls “networks of networks”—embedded in particular locations and places but at the same time capable of operating at different spatial scales, across space.

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10 See Chapters 3 and 6 for a discussion and implications of different types of ties in social networks.
Specifically, I want to think about how different kinds of network relations occurring at different scales, stretching across space, and located in different places, mediate the sustainability of collective action.

Massey’s (1991, 1993, 1999b) conceptualization of social relations as geographic and networked, and of space and place as the product of such interrelations—what she calls a “power-geometry”—provides a useful template for such a project. Drawing from a relational view of space and place, Massey theorizes social relations as stretching out over space at every different scale, from the household, to the local, to the international arena. At the same time, Massey sees social relations as embedded in the wider workings of local and global networks. Furthermore, Massey argues that this has an impact in terms of the power individuals hold in relation to these flows and interconnections, because different groups and individuals are placed in distinct ways in relation to such flows.

What I find interesting about Massey’s power-geometry argument is that it opens the door to exploring its connections with network approaches to the study of social movements. Both perspectives share the interest of attempting to better understand the impact of different kinds of network relations. Massey, for example, believes that the power-geometry metaphor helps clarify who has more or less mobility and access along the networks. I suggest that an even more “networked” view of the power-geometry of social relations can lead us to think about how activists achieve more control over mobility and/or access along the networks. By specifying network relations as being
differentiated simultaneously by their spatiality and their type, we avoid an analysis of absolute space and rather highlight the processes and relations that enable or produce particular spatialities (Massey et al., 1999).11

As I will show in this study, this simultaneous differentiation is useful to explain how the Madres have sustained collective action through networks over time and also to understand how conflict among the Madres has manifested in recent years. In the chapters that follow, I specifically examine network processes (i.e. how networks operate at the onset and how relations among activists are formed, sustained, and challenged) and their related spatial dimensions (i.e., the way relations among activists operate in places and across space).

In sum, through an analysis of the case of the dynamic spatiality of the Madres' networks, I want to achieve the overall objective of this study: to make some general

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11 My position differs from that of geographers who have adopted actor-network theory (ANT) in their analysis of networks. In my opinion, many applications of ANT in geography have blurred the lines between networks and spatiality to the extent that there is not a clear difference between the two. For example, because ANT conceptualizes space as being bound into networks, some geographers have claimed that “...any assessment of spatial qualities is simultaneously an assessment of network relations” (Murdoch, 1997, 332). However, this leads to vague specifications of the importance of the spatiality of network relations. This is unsurprising considering that Bruno Latour, of the main proponents of ANT, has argued that “…the difficulty we have in defining all associations in terms of networks is due to the prevalence of geography” (Latour, 1996, 371). Here I wish to provide neither a critique of ANT theory or of ANT informed geographic research, but simply to clarify that ANT’s conceptualization of networks is amenable to a spatial vocabulary that erases the difference between the social in general and the more explicitly spatial (see Pratt G, 1999 and Pratt G, 1992). My position is that the analysis of the geography of social movement networks requires a constructionist view of networks that emphasizes different types of network relations without making geography bound into networks to the extent that, in the end, there is no distinguishable difference between such a perspective and that of the (practically non-spatial) network theories that we know today.
statements about the sustainability and effectiveness of collective action and about the conflicts that challenge the sustainability of activism. That is the theme of the chapters that follow.
CHAPTER 3

THE SPATIALITY OF EMBEDDEDNESS: EMOTIONS, NETWORKS, AND THE CONTINUITY OF THE MADRES DE PLAZA DE MAYO

In the Plaza de Mayo we were all alike. We asked each other: “what happened to you?” “How did it happen?” We were all similar to one another. They had taken away all of our sons and daughters, we were all suffering the same; we had all been to the same places. It seemed that there was no difference or distance. That is why we felt so well together. The walking, holding each other arms tenaciously, connecting with one another. We became stronger; we were growing as human beings together (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1995, 15; emphasis mine).

3.1-Introduction

What was most striking in my encounters with different groups of Madres was the nature of their personal relationships and interactions with one another. Every time the Madres greeted one another, they kissed and hugged warmly. I often saw many of them walking hand in hand on their way to the Plaza de Mayo, chatting, sometimes talking politics, many others talking about their plans for dinner or the weekend. I was also fortunate enough to be part of some of their organizational meetings and to share afternoons with them in their offices when they were planning different activities. On all these occasions, I saw that the way the Madres talked and interacted with one another
was surprisingly familiar. One particular afternoon, I was at the offices of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo in downtown Buenos Aires when I heard many of the Madres scream with joy, laugh, and even cry. One of the Madres who had been very sick and had not been able to come and spend time to work with the rest had stopped by the office unannounced, surprising everybody. She was feeling better, and was ready to resume work. All of the Madres hugged and kissed her, welcoming her back.

Through my interactions with the Madres, I came to the realization that there were multiple dimensions to their activism, and that these different dimensions always included a strong emotional content. For example, in the past, the Argentine media and the military portrayed the Madres as “mad” women in an attempt to discredit the validity of their claims. According to the military, their “madness” was represented by the Madres’ public demonstrations in the Plaza de Mayo, where women cried in front of international television cameras pleading for the lives of their sons and daughters. Today, even though the Madres rarely cry in public anymore, most people in Argentina still describe the Madres by emphasizing the emotional sides of their activism. For their detractors, the Madres are “stubborn” and “hopeless” women who refuse to let go of the past and are unable to live happier lives. Those who admire them characterize them as “tough” and “strong” women who display heroic qualities when they confront politicians with harsh words and make hard-hitting statements to the media.

These competing public impressions about the Madres are loaded with emotional undertones, and certainly there has been an emotional side to the Madres’ activism that has been used strategically to attract media and government attention. For the Madres, however, expressing emotions goes beyond this. Emotions run deep into the core of the
interpersonal relations among the *Madres* themselves and define the nature of their activism. Consider the following. During a speech given during the Latin American Congress on International Relations and Peace Research in Guatemala in July of 1995, one of the *Madres* addressing the audience explained the “secret” behind their continued activism over so many years in the following words:

In the same way that, at the beginning, pain gave us the strength to denounce, demand, mobilize and fight for the truth about the sinister practice of the disappearing of people, today it is *our* pain that makes us promise that we will not rest, that we will not keep silent, and that we will not give up (*Madres* de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora, no date, emphases mine).

The references to pain as the motivation behind activism in the first place and of shared pain as the engine behind the continuation of collective action underscores the importance of considering feelings and emotions when analyzing the *Madres’* activism. Interestingly, the recent “cultural turn” in social movement theory (Johnston and Klandermans, 1995) pays increasing attention to emotional factors in the understanding of the overall micro dynamics of purposive collective action. The analysis of emotions is beginning to play an important role in social movement research (see for example Jasper and Poulsen, 1995; Jasper, 1998; Taylor V, 1995; Taylor V, 1996; Taylor and Rupp, 2001). While some years ago scholars of social movements tended to subsume emotions into cognitive processes (such as identity), today many argue for a more detailed treatment of emotions. The idea is to pay attention to how emotions “...give

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12 This approach to culture and cultural analysis, which focuses on relations and emotions and is based on a micro level, interactional analysis, is a departure from earlier approaches to the study of culture as an overarching macro level concept that influences the larger social system (see Fine, 1995, 127)
ideas, ideologies, identities, and even interests their power to motivate” (Jasper, 1998, 420). 13

The general agreement among culturally inclined social movement scholars today is that once protest is generated, it is often loaded with a variety of emotions that can keep people in a social movement or drive them away, and thus cohesion or dissolution is otherwise unaccounted. For example, Rupp and Taylor (1999) have shown in their analysis of transnational women organizations from the late nineteenth century through the Second World War that emotions were crucial for the creation of a loving community of women that transcended national affiliation and rivalries.

What does all this talk about emotions have to do with an understanding of the duration of the Madres’ activism from a geographic perspective? I suggest that the connection here is that emotions are linked to social relations (networks), and one of the goals of this study is to link the geographic dimensions of social networks to an understanding of the continuity of activism. Interestingly, the connections between the geographic dimensions of social relations and emotions have recently begun to be developed theoretically. Specifically, Ettlinger (2001a) has argued that relations among people are guided by multiple rationalities. These multiple rationalities include geographically fluid intimate and emotional dimensions that operate in an individual’s relational universe of interaction and are critical in binding people together.

13 Jasper’s (1998) detailed account of the role of emotions in protest and social movements distinguishes between affective (positive or negative affects such as loyalties to or fears of individuals, groups, places, symbols) and reactive (transitory responses to external events and information) emotions.
In this chapter, I take this research from the social movements and geography literature as an entry point for examining the emotional processes through the Madres in Argentina have become embedded in a network that contributes to sustain their activism over time. My objectives are twofold. First, I want to show how this social movement organization expanded across Argentina through the development of interpersonal networks of grieving mothers. In this chapter, I explain how the emergence of the Madres as a social movement organization and as an imagined community (Anderson, 1991) was dependent on the fact that women who previously did not know each other participated in different kinds of neighborhood, family, friendship, political, and workplace networks. I also show that women’s different degrees of embeddedness in these networks allowed them to access information about other women in the same situation.

I also want to argue that the development of these initial ties is not sufficient to explain how women who had unexpectedly become human rights activists were able to become and sustain a group of activists called Madres de Plaza de Mayo. This point is related to my other objectives in this chapter: I want to explain how the initial embeddedness of the Madres in a loose network of grieving mothers became stronger, and I want to elucidate the processes through which the Madres developed embedded ties capable of sustaining, over time, a cohesive network of activists of wide territorial scope that transcends formal organizational boundaries. I specifically approach this issue with specific reference to the emotional and symbolic ties that contributed to the formation of their network in the first place.

By analyzing this last theme through the experience of the Madres, my goal is also to shed light conceptually on a broader process: the relation between geography and
embeddedness (i.e., the integration of social action in networks of social relations) (Granovetter, 1985). I want to analyze the geographic dimensions of embeddedness beyond its common association with the local and with localized social processes. Specifically, to date, the geographic adaptation of the sociologist Granovetter’s (1985) seminal article on the relations between human action and social structure has emphasized the local character of embeddedness (see Perry, 1999 for a comprehensive review). From this perspective, embeddedness is dependent on relations of proximity. While some geographers have acknowledged that it is possible to map different levels of embeddedness to a hierarchy of places and spatial scales (McDowell, 1998; Ettlinger, 2001b), to date this type of research remains to be developed theoretically and empirically. I suggest that the analysis of the Madres’ embeddedness in a widespread network of activists is relevant to this research agenda.

To approach my research questions, I build upon a large literature (notably from sociology and political science) that has shown the crucial role of social networks for the recruitment and mobilization of social movement activists (Snow et al., 1980; Knoke and Wisely, 1990; Diani, 1995; della Porta and Diani, 1999). This literature is useful because it makes social networks a relevant unit of analysis for understanding processes of collective action. However, at the analytical level, this literature focuses mostly on network patterns (see for example, Rosenthal et al., 1985) and is silent on how the construction of such networks contributes to the maintenance of collective action and, specifically, to the internal cohesion of either formal social movement organizations or more informal groups of activists. Moreover, research from the sociological and political science perspective has not examined the geographic dimensions of social networks.
beyond specifying the relation between network cohesion and locality-based association. My goal is to use the literature on social movement networks and more generally, the literature on networks from economic sociology, as springboards to investigate how processes of network cohesion, notably embeddedness, operate beyond the local scale. Drawing on the case of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo I ask: how is activists’ embeddedness in interpersonal networks of social relations maintained across space? What role do feelings, emotions, and other subjective and personal dimensions play in the maintenance of unity of a network that is geographically widespread? I suggest that an answer to this question can broaden our understanding of the geographic dimensions of embeddedness. I also suggest that the insights regarding embeddedness among the Madres in Argentina have broad implications for understanding cohesion in many types of organizations, from social movement organizations to firms, in any one of a number of contexts.

I adopt a cultural perspective on the way social movement activists become and remain embedded in specific social networks. As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, my focus is on the analysis of the emotional processes that underpin the construction and sustenance of a network of interpersonal relations. My approach is different from traditional approaches to the analysis of social networks because such research tends to analyze the “ground level” dimensions of social networks. By “ground level” dimensions of networks I refer to the regular, more-measurable, and realized patterns of relationships among individuals, groups, and organizations that lead to certain structural arrangements. My focus, instead, pays close attention to the emotional and symbolic dimensions of network relations. Such dimensions are more subjective and refer
to the way individuals and groups imagine and feel they are a part of certain networks. Attention to these dimensions is important because actors may feel connected to others by means of shared cognitive and emotional processes even if actual network interactions are minimal. I argue that an analysis of these dimensions can help uncover other submerged network geographies that may not be readily discernible or mappable. Specifically, my argument is that the emotional foundations of social networks—built around shared feelings and symbolic constructions—are crucial for the emergence, sustainability, and cohesion of groups of activists in social movements. Moreover, I want to show that when these dimensions of social networks are taken into account, the process of network embeddedness does not necessarily remain dependent on relations of geographic proximity or on a locality, but rather evolves into a highly dynamic and geographically flexible process that embraces a relational understanding of place and space. By analyzing the case of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, I argue that the geographic flexibility of embeddedness, in turn, is often of strategic value to tactics of collective action.

The chapter proceeds in the following way. In the next section, I set the stage for the analysis of the embeddedness of the Madres in a network of activists by (re)constructing the historical geography of this social movement community. Documenting the formation and territorial spread of the Madres' network is important because social movement scholars have shown that the social networks that bond people together are responsible for their transformation into activists and political actors (Taylor and Whittier, 1992). Furthermore, geographers interested in collective action and in
practices of resistance more generally have argued that the development of networks of activists is often accompanied by their mobility and simultaneous *territorialization* (both material and symbolic) across space (Pile, 1997; Routledge, 1997b)\(^{14}\).

The next section documents the extent of the *Madres*’ network over time. Subsequently, I examine the network’s characteristics in relation to the concept of embeddedness. I critically review the embeddedness thesis and summarize how scholars have theorized the relations between geography, networks, and embeddedness. I then situate the embeddedness argument within the larger literature on social networks in economic sociology and ground the analysis of the *Madres* by drawing from a revised network perspective that takes a *cultural approach* in its theoretical formulation (e.g. Ansell, 1997). Finally, I integrate my perspective on embeddedness with the literature on *cultural analysis* of social movements, a subset of social movement theory (e.g. Johnston and Klandermans, 1995) and, using narratives and archival data, I show how network embeddedness for the *Madres* has been a geographically flexible process, unconstrained by relations of proximity in any one locality, and sustained by *emotional ties* and a *symbolic understanding of place*. I conclude the chapter with a general argument for our understanding of the geography of embeddedness and social networks.

\(^{14}\) Territorialization is often understood as a specific spatial strategy “...whereby individuals or groups attempt to exercise control over a give portion of space” (Agnew, 1994, 620)

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3.2-The development of a network of activist mothers across Argentina

3.2.1 From spontaneous resistance to organized activism

The meeting of mothers in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires in 1977 marked the first public appearance of a collective that later came to be known as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. However, women searching for their disappeared sons and daughters had already been meeting each other informally for months before that date. Since the first disappearances of people began taking place during the last civilian government (under Isabel Perón, Juan Perón’s second wife) in 1975, many women had encountered each other in police stations, government offices, churches, and prisons as they searched for information about their children. After the initial public meeting, women continued to meet in the Plaza de Mayo every week, walking in silence and comforting each other as they developed new strategies to find their missing sons and daughters. Scholars have previously argued that the Madres’ weekly silent marches in a public space heavily controlled by the police and the military were the beginning of a new politics of resistance that defied and resisted the military dictatorship in a novel manner. As Radcliffe (1993) and Bouvard (1994) have argued, the Madres’ first meetings represented a significant change in the political positions and spaces traditionally occupied by women in Argentina and Latin America.

In 1977, as the first groups of Madres de Plaza de Mayo met in Buenos Aires, other women were starting to mobilize in the city of La Plata, about an hour and a half away from Buenos Aires. Soon after, women from both cities met when women from
La Plata started to travel to Buenos Aires to meet in the Plaza. Aside from the “formal” gatherings in the Plaza, women were starting to meet in churches and their own homes to plan further action.

Over time, the Madres developed their own unofficial organization and their own communication network. They first divided into several groups in the vast Buenos Aires metropolitan area, where a member (selected on a rotating basis) was responsible for keeping in touch with other members in different parts of the city to ensure the flow of communication and information across a large urban area (personal communication with a member from Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora, September, 1999). There were no settled leaders in any of the geographic zones into which they divided (East, West, North and South of Buenos Aires as well as La Plata). Rather, leadership in each group rotated routinely to ensure that all members would be involved to the same extent. Further, the rotation of leadership protected the group in case any of the members would be “disappeared” by the military.\(^ {15} \) Each group was responsible for recruiting more women in their assigned geographic zone.

In 1978, a group of women (also mothers of disappeared people) in the city of Lomas de Zamora (south of Buenos Aires) joined the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. As more mothers began mobilizing, the military increased its control of the Plaza de Mayo, often

\(^ {15} \) Three Madres de Plaza de Mayo disappeared during the organizational period of the group. Two of the Madres (Ms. Esther Ballestrino de Careaga and Ms. Mary Ponce de Bianco) were kidnapped and together with a group of relatives of disappeared people outside the church of Santa Cruz in Buenos Aires on December 8\(^ {th} \), 1977. A few days later, the leader and founder of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Ms. Azucena Villaflor, was kidnapped and disappeared outside of her home.
arresting women as they approached the Plaza or on their way home. In 1979, the military control of the Plaza and the harassment of Madres were such that women had to put a temporary halt to their weekly marches. It was that same year that activist mothers who had been mobilizing together for over a year in Buenos Aires and its suburbs and in La Plata decided to become a formal social movement organization adopting the official name of Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

In 1980, the Madres were able to return to the Plaza de Mayo and their weekly visits attracted more and more women. The Madres' disruptive activities in public places (such as during official government celebrations of holidays in public places, during pilgrimages and masses) became a trademark of their politics of resistance. Also in 1980 the Madres opened their first office in downtown Buenos Aires (known as Casa de las Madres). The same year, the Madres in La Plata illegally published the first edition of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo newsletter, which was distributed among members and other human rights activists around the country and abroad.

In 1981, security around the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires was more relaxed as international pressure against the military government slowly increased. The visibility of the Madres became even greater after women organized the first Marcha de la Resistencia (March of Resistance), a 24-hour silent march in the Plaza de Mayo. This first demonstration drew a crowd of eighty mothers who walked together for 24 hours in front of the Casa Rosada. Considering the political context of Argentina in 1981, the event was a success. No other group of activists of any other social movement had been
able to demonstrate in public in such a prominent place since the beginning of the military dictatorship in 1976. For the Madres, this was an event of great significance: they had appropriated the Plaza de Mayo.

3.2.2-The territorial expansion of a network of Madres de Plaza de Mayo

As the visibility of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires began to increase, women in other places across Argentina began getting together and forming their own groups of mothers of the disappeared. The emergence of similar groups of activist mothers across the country should not be surprising given that the kidnappings and illegal detention of the civilian population had not remained geographically concentrated in Buenos Aires and its metropolitan area. Rather, “disappearances” had been taking place in all major cities across the country. The military government had created their own network of paramilitary groups that operated throughout the country: according to research conducted by different human rights groups, there were over 300 illegal detention centers and concentration camps scattered in cities across Argentina (Madres de Plaza de Mayo – Línea Fundadora, 1991). Thus, women who shared similar grievances could be found throughout Argentina as well.

Many of the Madres were already active in other pre-existing human rights organizations but, from the beginning, women who were mothers of the disappeared did not feel comfortable working with the other human rights organizations. Most of the Madres’ approach to politics can be characterized by what Lichterman (1996) calls a
“politics of personalized commitment” that did not fit well with the more bureaucratic approach that other human rights groups were following at the time. According to one of the Madres:

We did not belong to any political parties, and many of the existing human rights organizations were connected to political parties. For example, the Argentine League for Human Rights and the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights were already active organizations, but we did not feel good working with them. The Assembly was mostly an elite group, full of politicians…it was not a place for us. There was also the Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights, but that was also different. We were looking for our sons and daughters. We only felt good among ourselves. That is the reason why I always say that we first mobilized and then, later, once we knew how to mobilize, we [formally] organized. From the first time we met, it was clear to us that we did not want to be a political party and that is why we never even accepted a free bus pass from anybody with a connection to a political party (personal communication, September, 1999).

Thus, women began leaving other human rights organizations and formed new groups under different names. Archival records show that already in 1978, women began meeting in the historic oceanside city and resort of Mar del Plata, 4 hours away from Buenos Aires. In November 1981, another group of women left a group of activists that operated under the name Familiares de Desaparecidos (“Relatives of the Disappeared”) in the northern province of Tucumán and began calling themselves Madres de Detenidos-Desaparecidos de Tucuman (“Mothers of the Detained and Disappeared of Tucuman”) (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1997a). Similar situations took place among groups of mothers of disappeared in the Patagonia region of Argentina (where women formed a group called Madres de Desaparecidos de Neuquen y Alto Valle) as well as in the northern province of La Rioja in 1982 (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1997b).
From 1977 to the early 1980s, the different groups of mothers of disappeared people that have emerged after the original group in Buenos Aires continued mobilizing across the country. Slowly, each of them began gathering the attention of both the international (first) and national press (much later) as they continued their public displays of activism where they confronted the police and blamed government authorities and officials for the disappearing of their sons and daughters.

By 1982, the Falklands War precipitated the fall of a military government that had already begun feeling international pressure as a result of its dismal human rights records (e.g., in 1979, Argentina was investigated by the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights and the same year Adolfo Perez Esquivel, an Argentine human rights and peace activist, received the Nobel Price). In 1983, Argentines democratically elected a new government that, however, was unable to provide solutions to the demands of human rights groups: justice and punishment for those responsible for the estimated 30,000 disappeared. Instead, in an effort to put an end to the horrible legacy of the military, the government passed two immunity laws (“Full Stop Law” in 1986 and “Due Obedience Law” in 1987) that put a 60-day limit on presenting charges against officers and pardoned hundreds of junior officers. The Madres never accepted the validity of the immunity laws. As one of the Madres put it: “These are laws that are both unconstitutional and immoral” (personal communication, September, 1999).

In a new political context (a functioning democracy), the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo continued mobilizing and strengthened their activities. Their membership grew even larger and reached even further across geographic boundaries. The main organization of Madres based in Buenos Aires was a key component of a large network

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of human rights groups throughout Argentina. As noted in minutes from a group meeting, by the early 1980s the members of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires had decided that:

...one of the main objectives of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo is to create independent groups of Madres in different localities [and] to support all kinds of activities in any places where it might be possible to formally establish a new group of Madres (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1984b, pp.13-14).

Therefore, the large group of mothers grouped under the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo (based in Buenos Aires) slowly began recruiting and incorporating the groups of mothers of the disappeared that had independently formed across the country. By 1984, there were already 21 groups of mothers of the disappeared across Argentina who identified as Madres de Plaza de Mayo, including chapters in the cities of Mendoza, La Rioja, Catamarca, Ledesma, Calilegua, Salta, Concordia, Río Cuarto, Mar del Plata, Zárate, Quilmes, Punta Alta, Bahía Blanca, Gualeguaychú, La Plata, Tucumán, Ayacucho, Quilmes, Junín, Lomas de Zamora, and San Juan (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1984b, pp.13-14). (Figure 3.1)
Figure 3.1: The location of chapters of *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* across Argentina, 1984.
3.2.3-Organizational division of the Madres: the emergence of a two-level network

In spite of the mobilizing effectiveness of mothers of the disappeared across Argentina, the original and largest group (the Buenos Aires-based Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo) was riddled with internal conflicts resulting from disagreements over leadership and strategy as well as over what the goals and methodology of activism should be in a new democratic environment. This led to the first organizational division in 1986, when a group of women left the Asociación to form a parallel organization of Madres named Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Línea Fundadora (Founding Line of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo). The name chosen for this new formal organization reflects the perception of some women that the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo had lost track of the original principles that gave birth to the Madres. According to them, what was needed was a new organizational structure that reflected the ideals of the “founding” mothers. Therefore, the new organization consisted of most of the first 14 original Madres who had met in the Plaza in 1977 as well as some newer members who did not feel comfortable within the organizational structure of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

The Madres who left the Asociación disapproved of the increased centralization and vertical leadership structure of the existing organization. Instead, the Madres from the Línea Fundadora envisioned a more horizontal and decentralized approach to the group where local chapters would have more independence. The Asociación, instead, remained a large, centralized organization that was managed from Buenos Aires and decided on strategies of national scope for all the groups of Madres across the country.
The problem was also one of leadership. When the Asociación was formally established in 1979, it was organized hierarchically, with a president as the leader of the group and a vice-president who was second in charge. The women who formed Madres-Linea Fundadora believed that this organizational structure was not conducive to full participation of all members, and claimed that the original horizontal structure of the Madres (when the Madres was not a formal organization) would foment a better internal democracy and benefit the group in the long term.

Finally, the group of Madres who gathered in the Linea Fundadora group believed that a new institutional environment in Argentina also meant that some of the strategies that the Madres had used during the times of the military dictatorship were no longer the best means to advance their struggle to bring out the truth about the disappearances. They believed that a less confrontational approach was needed if a stronger civil society was to emerge in Argentina. Thus, the Fundadoras favored a coalition-building approach to future action that included working in coordination with other human rights groups. They also favored a closer relationship with the new government, which at the time seemed willing to investigate the Madres' claims. The position of Madres-Linea Fundadora regarding cooperation with the state was (and still is) consistent with the views of other human rights groups and social movements in Argentina and throughout Latin America that believe that collective action and cultural politics can reach into formal representative political arenas.16

16 On this point, see Dagnino's (1998) discussion of the relation between Latin American social movements and the emergence of new concepts and practices of citizenship.
The Madres in the Asociación, instead, believed that working independently of other groups would be a more effective strategy to achieve the goals of the movement. In fact, the leaders in the Asociación had been at odds with the strategies followed by other human rights groups since the return to a democratic system in Argentina because many of them had established contacts with (now legal) political parties and with government officials at different levels. Similarly, leadership in the Asociación mistrusted the government’s intentions and did not see any differences between the new government and the military dictatorship. Therefore, for the Madres in the Asociación, strong, confrontational style politics outside the realm of formal representative politics were still in order.

In sum, for the Fundadoras, the unwillingness of the leaders of the Asociación to soften their position vis-à-vis the government was a mistake because if democracy was to work in Argentina, the Madres would have to be willing to negotiate and to recognize a plurality of voices and positions. For leaders of the Asociación, the Fundadoras were simply "selling out" to a weak democratic government that still operated in the shadow of the military and to politicians who were more interested in their own personal benefit than in prosecuting those responsible for the disappearances of thousands of people.

After the organizational division, the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo retained most of the groups of mothers in the interior of the country under its control. However, by the late 1980s and early 1990s, more local groups spun off from the Asociación and began acting independently, due to disagreements similar to those that cause the initial division in 1986. For example, the group of Madres in La Plata (one of the original groups) unofficially left Asociación Madres in 1996 and formally announced
its independence from them in 1999. In this city, only one Madre (out of a total of sixty women) remained "loyal" to the Asociación. Other groups became loosely linked with Madres – Línea Fundadora, such as a group of mothers in Ledesma, Jujuy.

By the year 2000, Madres-Linea Fundadora began capitalizing on the organizational collapse of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo and women in this group began working much more closely with groups of mothers in Mar del Plata, Tucumán, and Villaguay. Still, the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo retained most of the groups in the network.

Currently, and in spite of the different organizational affiliations of the different groups, the network of Madres de Plaza de Mayo across Argentina remains large and active, with 21 organized local chapters in 17 cities across Argentina and about 2000 members (of these, however, only about 350 women are active members who routinely mobilize) (personal communication, September, 1999).

The most interesting feature of the network of Madres today is that it operates at two different levels simultaneously. It constitutes a real "network of networks" (such as the one I described conceptually in Chapter 2) where multiple allegiances give place to a complex web of interactions among individual members and formal organizational structures (the organizational affiliations and locations of all the different groups of Madres de Plaza de Mayo operating across Argentina today are summarized in Table 3.1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of Group of Madres de Plaza de Mayo</th>
<th>Organizational Affiliation</th>
<th>Year formally established</th>
<th>Current active members (estimated)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buenos Aires</td>
<td>Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buenos Aires</td>
<td>Madres – Línea Fundadora</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Plata</td>
<td>Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Plata</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lomas de Zamora</td>
<td>Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luján</td>
<td>Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar del Plata</td>
<td>Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar del Plata</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayacucho</td>
<td>Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Juan</td>
<td>Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Rioja</td>
<td>Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mendoza</td>
<td>Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tucumán</td>
<td>Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tucumán</td>
<td>Madres – Línea Fundadora</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ledesma – Jujuy</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuquén</td>
<td>Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Fé</td>
<td>Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concordia</td>
<td>Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gualeguaychú</td>
<td>Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosario</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villaguay</td>
<td>Madres – Línea Fundadora</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: The network of Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, 2000. Table compiled through interviews and archival research.
On the one hand, the more visible or tangible dimension of the network that I have described thus far in this chapter is structured around the organizational divisions that emerged since 1986. One dimension of this web is a centralized network of 14 chapters of mothers of the disappeared who are associated with the Buenos-Aires based Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo. As Figure 3.2 shows, the network is commanded and organized from Buenos Aires and chapters in the interior have little formal interaction with each other without the mediation of the Buenos Aires group.

The other dimension of this visible web of Madres is a horizontal and decentralized network of 3 chapters of Madres organized under the Línea Fundadora group who mobilize and work in coordination with an even less structured web of Madres de Plaza de Mayo who define themselves as "independent". As Figure 3.3 shows, all the groups in this network frequently interact with each other and the network does not have an evident hierarchy.

Both maps show that the resulting network patterns are the spatial manifestation of different organizational forms. Such organizational forms are in turn “pre-figurative” of the different styles of political activism and goals of the two groups (Arnold, 1995, 285) and they condition the kinds of coalition building strategies that the two groups can pursue (see Chapter 6 for detailed discussion of this issue).
Figure 3.2: The centralized network of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, year 2000. The formal interactions among the different groups are controlled by the large group of Madres in Buenos Aires.

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Figure 3.3: The decentralized and less structured network of mothers of the disappeared who are either independent or organized under the name *Madres de Madres de Plaza de Mayo–Linea Fundadora*, Year 2000. The network does not have a hierarchy and all groups formally interact with each other at their own will.
On the other hand, at the more personal and experiential levels of activism the network of Madres remains unified and cohesive irrespective of organizational differences and affiliations. Today, even though activists acknowledge their different organizational affiliations, they identify first as Madres de Plaza de Mayo, emphasizing their common experiences and collective identities. This second subjective and personal dimension of the Madres' network is what I am interested in further analyzing in the following sections of this chapter. As I have already explained in the introduction, I want to do so with reference to the concept of embeddedness or, in other words, the integration of social action in a network of relations. Specifically, the questions I entertain for the remainder of this chapter are: How is it that, despite organizational divisions and in spite of changing organizational allegiances among members of the different groups, a widespread network of mothers of the disappeared has remained cohesive and continued to be active in Argentina for over two decades? What is the relationship between emotional ties among women and their continued embeddedness in a network of activist mothers? Finally, what does the case of the Madres tell us about the geographic dimensions of embeddedness? Answering these questions requires, first, developing a conceptual framework that links these concerns together.

3.3—Embeddedness, emotions, and geography

3.3.1—Does embeddedness have a place?

In his seminal article on economic action and social structure, Granovetter (1985) offered an account of human action that avoided both under-socialized (e.g. cultural determinism) and over socialized (e.g. extreme rational choice) views by defining social
relations structurally and arguing that all human behavior is embedded in networks of interpersonal relations. In an elaboration of his ideas, Granovetter later explained that the concept of embeddedness referred to the fact that "...all social action and outcomes are affected by actors...pairwise relations and by the structure of the overall network of relations" (Granovetter, 1992, 33, original emphasis). From the time of its original inception, the concept of embeddedness was associated with network processes; more specifically, embeddedness was related to the relational and structural dimensions of social networks. Whereas relational embeddedness refers to how human behavior towards others depends on a structure of mutual expectations that is a constitutive part of the overall relationship, structural embeddedness refers to the wider socio-historical context in which social networks operate and to all the variety of relationships that are part of a social network and affect its own dynamics (Granovetter, 1992, 35).

Granovetter’s work on the problem of embeddedness has received wide attention across the social sciences, including geography (Perry, 1999). Even though Granovetter’s original formulation of the embeddedness thesis does not have any explicit geographic connotations, most discussions about the geographic dimensions of embeddedness stress the rootedness of social phenomena in localities and specific settings. For example, Hanson and Pratt’s (1995) research on gender-based occupational segregation relies on analysis of the relations between locality and embeddedness to show how different structures of employment opportunity were constructed in a specific urban setting through the enabling or constraining characteristics of social networks. Similarly, other
geographers such as Amin and Thrift (1994) and Storper (1997) focus on the territorial embeddedness of firms and markets in social and cultural networks of relations by placing emphasis on localities or regions.

While geographers have contributed by infusing embeddedness with a geographic dimension, the analysis of the relation between geography and embeddedness needs further elaboration. Some have even argued that the term embeddedness has come to be part of geography's conceptual vocabulary without a proper examination of its definition or theoretical significance (Martin and Sunley, 2001). To date, geographers have mostly taken embeddedness to mean what the sociologist Ansell (2000) explicitly defines as territorial embeddedness, that is, embeddedness in reference to the local character of associations. As Ansell explains, the territorial view of embeddedness assumes that "...the more local the territorial scope of an association, the more it will be embedded in the face to face networks associated with territorial residence and proximity" (Ansell, 2000). Specifically, there is an almost explicit association in the economic geography literature that deals with networks between embeddedness and locality. This association leads to the belief that embeddedness necessarily depends on the interplay between network relations and relations of proximity. The opposite side of this association is the belief that less embeddedness occurs as (geographic) distance increases among members of a network.17

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17 This is not to say, however, that such an association is characteristic of the geographic literature in general (see for example, Ettlinger, 1994; Ettlinger and Patton, 1996; Pile, 1997; Mitchell, 1998).
This view of the geographic characteristics of embeddedness is, however, incomplete because it reduces our understanding of geographic processes to a single preoccupation with locality or proximity. Even though such a relationship is important to theorize and document, a more in depth examination of the geographic characteristics of network relations can result in a richer understanding of the geographic dimensions of embeddedness. Specifically, the relation between embeddedness and the different geographic dimensions of network processes require analysis. For example, networks can be either closed or open and can develop either in a setting or a locality (as in a neighborhood) or across space (e.g. a non-place based association of firms; a cyber community of shared interests). As I have suggested in Chapter 1, at issue is analyzing how fluid relations in a single network can result in changing spatial manifestations for that same network (Ettlinger, 2000; 2001).

The virtually uni-dimensional treatment of embeddedness within geography is unlike the situation in other disciplines, where scholars have further theorized what Uzzi (1996) has called a "...conceptually vague formulation of embeddedness" and adapted and modified it to apply to a variety of empirical scenarios. For example, the concept of embeddedness is popular in the economic sociology literature, where scholars focus on the variety of ways in which embeddedness and network structures are related to the economic performance and competitiveness of firms and organizations (Uzzi, 1996;
1999). To date, however, only a few geographers have drawn from this literature that offers more insightful analysis of embeddedness and empirically elaborated on it (but see McDowell, 1998).\(^{18}\)

I offer this brief overview of research on embeddedness as an entry point to discuss what I see as some of the limitations of the treatment of embeddedness. First, while scholars in other disciplines have refined the applicability of the concept embeddedness to account for a variety of conditions and network processes, this has not been the case among geographers. In most cases, geographers’ treatment of embeddedness has more to do with the recognition that the presence and development of social networks is conducive to interaction and cooperation among people (e.g. among workers in a firm, among firms, among people in a neighborhood, etc.) rather than to an actual examination of how interaction (a network process) leads to embeddedness at the outset. Less attention has been directed to issues of relational embeddedness, which concern questions of how different kinds of network relations and processes enable or constrain the embeddedness of social action in specific social networks.

\(^{18}\) McDowell’s analysis of recruitment practices in merchant banking in the City of London stands out as an exception. This research showed that different banks in the City of London produced a variety of embedded organizational behaviors that depended on a combination of political, structural, cultural, and individual factors (McDowell, 1997, 122).
This is important to the questions I raise about the Madres because I am interested in analyzing how women have been able to remain embedded in a network of activists for such an extended period of time. Second, I aim to show how embeddedness may be created and maintained beyond the local and across space. This problem also relates to my concerns about the Madres because their network is not localized but rather expands across Argentina and even abroad.

My interest in this chapter is to reconnect embeddedness with network processes from a geographic perspective. From this point of departure, one of the questions that remain to be answered is: Does embeddedness require territorial association or dependence on a locality? Is geography important to processes of embeddedness only when associations rely on relations of proximity? I am specifically interested in exploring how the processes of embeddedness in a specific social network play out when such a network no longer operates in a “fixed” setting. Throughout the analysis of the Madres’ development of a network of activists across Argentina, I ask: How do actors in a network attempt to maintain network embeddedness if (or when) their network becomes geographically extensive and its territorial scope expands?

3.3.2-Connecting embeddedness, network theory, and cultural analysis

The concept of embeddedness has to be situated within the wider set of theoretical constructs of network theory in economic sociology. The assumptions that underlie discussions of embeddedness rely on a single premise that is characteristic of network theory as a whole: that patterns of linkages can be used to account for some aspects of the behavior of those involved in a network (Knoke, 1991). At the core of network theory is
an examination of the consequences of the changing patterns and organization of interactions occurring among actors who are often embedded and/or participate in one or more social networks. In turn, actors’ positions in a network are continually shaped by highly flexible and dynamic interactions among them; this results in the social construction of dynamic and constantly changing networks (Knoke and Kuklinski, 1982; Knoke, 1990; Scott, 1991; Nohria and Eccles, 1992; Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994). It is this emphasis on dynamic relations that permits supporters of the structural network paradigm to claim that the perspective provides a better nexus between macro and micro levels of analysis of social phenomena.

A problem with reconnecting the concept of embeddedness with the network literature to focus on how processes of embeddedness occur is that, to date, most studies in the network perspective are limited to analyses of structural forms (e.g., Burt, 1992; Knoke, 1990). This is symptomatic of what Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994) have called the “structural determinism” of the network paradigm. One of the main problems with such structural approaches is the rigid conceptualization and depiction of flows and connections in analysis of network relations. For example, a large portion of network research relies on distinctions between "strong" and "weak" ties (Granovetter 1973). According to Granovetter, the strength of a tie is defined by a “…linear combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding) and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie” (Granovetter, 1973). Difference in strength of ties gives rise to differentiated relations in a network. Whereas “strong” (characterized by higher emotional intensity and reciprocation between two people, for example) create more cohesive bonds, “weak” ties allow for wider transmission of ideas because they are
non-“redundant” and form a unique path between two people. A particular problem is that distinction between the strength of ties has often been measured only in terms of frequency of contacts, ignoring the other important dimensions that were part of Granovetter's original formulation (such as *intimacy* and *emotional content*).\(^9\)

Reacting to issues such as the rigid conceptualization of network connections and network structures, there have been calls for a more explicit attention to cultural issues in network analysis (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994; Ansell, 1997; DiMaggio, 1992). The argument from the cultural critique is that if network analysis is to provide a better account of macro and micro linkages of social action, it needs to account for actors’ orientations toward one another and the world (DiMaggio, 1992, 188). This requires more attention to subjective issues (e.g., relations based on cognitive, identity, emotional, and moral bonds) that preclude the regular quantitative methodologies of network analysis. In effect, the problem with relying on mathematical modeling and other quantitative techniques to account for different degrees of connectivity in social networks (see for example Scott, 1991; Knoke and Kuklinski, 1982) is *epistemological*. Specifically, quantitative techniques cannot account for the individual and social actions that shape the patterns of a network and thus they neglect to consider the potential causal role of the beliefs, values, and interests of the actors in a social network (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994). This leads to a reification of social relations because the main focus of

\(^{9}\) This problem might also stem from Granovetter's silence about how to operationalize the continuum of strength of ties in actual research. In fact, in his now famous article on the strength of weak ties, Granovetter stated that the “...discussion of operational measures of and weights attaching to each of the four elements is postponed to future empirical studies” (Granovetter, 1973, 1361).
the research lies in an identification of linkages among “concrete” actors (e.g. social movement organizations), thereby abstracting the formal or “objective” dimensions of social relations from their political, cultural, and social contexts (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994).

There have been some advances in this area, in particular in the area of collective action, where scholars have paid increasing attention to the cultural dimensions of social movements. For example, in their analysis of American civil rights activists who participated in the Mississippi Freedom Rides during the summer of 1964, McAdam and Paulsen (1993) concluded that organizational embeddedness (measured as strong ties among participants) were insufficient to motivate activism; rather, McAdam and Paulsen concluded that a strong subjective identification with a particular identity was more likely to encourage participation. Similarly, Ansell’s (1997) analysis of the realignment of the French working class at the end of the 19th century showed that symbols have powerful mobilizing effects that contribute to network cohesion. For example, Ansell showed that workers responding to different allegiances found solidarity and collective representation around the symbolic power of the “general strike”. It is then through the interplay between non-measurable organizing symbols and social or inter-organizational networks that organizational cohesion can emerge (Ansell, 1997, 360).

I find these types of analysis a welcomed addition to network research, specifically because this kind of research does not incorporate the cultural as a presumed category. What is significant about this line of work is that it shows how, for example, symbolic constructions are formed and how they play a significant role amongst networks of individuals, groups, and organizations. Yet, this scholarship is exceptional and suffers
from one limitation. Even though the power of a particular symbolic construction or cultural repertoire is acknowledged, such elements are still treated as external variables, or as yet another separate dimension that influences network structures (see for example, Erickson, 1996). As a result, the value that attention to cultural dimensions brings to network analysis is lost if “culture” is treated as “add on” variable that helps describe network patterns rather than as inseparable from the process of network formation and development.

My argument is that while the incorporation of cultural “variables” provides a more complete and dynamic picture of network formation and evolution than strict structural accounts do, it still provides an incomplete understanding of the role of cultural processes in network dynamics. I suggest that cultural dynamics and cultural analysis need to be incorporated in network analysis in a more relational fashion. Specifically, what remains to be examined further is not just how cultural constructions such as collective identity and symbols affect social networks (e.g. Ansell, 1997) but how certain processes that operate at the cognitive and emotional level are constitutive of, and inseparable from, the networks through which they operate. I argue that an understanding of such processes as constitutive of the networks can change our understanding of how actors’ embeddedness in a network unfolds and it is sustained. Further, such an analysis

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20 Despite recent claims that depict the network literature in economic sociology as fundamentally concerned with analysis of processes (Emirbayer, 1997), this has not been the case to date. Ettlinger (2001b) has noted that even though economic sociologists view of “processes” consists of thinking about relations among variables or things (as opposed to variables themselves), their view still leads to a narrow concern with patterns of relations as opposed to processes because the dynamics that form and transform networks and network relations in the first place are ignored.
can uncover a geography of embeddedness that may not be otherwise discernible: this type of framework can answer questions that traditional, quantitative approaches to network analysis cannot accommodate and also changes the conclusions.

3.4- The Madres de Plaza de Mayo: Culture, emotions, and embedded ties

The notion that social movements often emerge out of pre-existing networks of social relations is one of the main contributions from research in social movements in the last three decades (Taylor and Rupp, 2001). The social movement literature is peppered with research that links pre-existing networks of social relations, embeddedness, and strong ties to explain the recruitment and mobilization strategies of social movements (McAdam, 1988; McAdam and Paulsen, 1993). It is commonly assumed that social movements emerge out of preexisting networks of social relations because individuals are embedded in such networks, and such embeddedness is thought of as being produced and sustained by strong ties.

Embeddedness and strong ties, however, are not necessarily tied together. The relation between embeddedness and strong ties is better cast as the relationship between embeddedness and embedded ties. Embeddedness is a process that must be seen as operating in a continuum that ranges from low to high and whose intensity depends on the degree to which network relations range from arm’s length ties at one end to fully embedded ties at the other (Uzzi, 1996). Thus, while social movements often are born out of preexisting networks of social relations, they are not necessarily characterized by embedded ties, if by embedded ties we understand relations built on interpersonal trust, reciprocity, and shared cultural meanings and emotions (Uzzi, 1996; Taylor and Rupp,
A network of activists—that later might develop into one or more formal social movement organizations or social movement communities characterized by a high degree of embedded ties—might be born out of the initial grievances that affect a particular group of people who did not know each other previously but who were loosely embedded in a variety of *overlapping social networks* (Ettlinger, 2000; 2001b), based on shared experiences of similar conditions (e.g., as in connections forged as a result of a diaspora of ethnic minorities in [a] particular locality/ies).²¹

The origin of the *Madres* as a group of human rights activists has been narrated by a few scholars (Bousquet, 1983; Simpson and Bennet, 1985; Bouvard, 1994) in terms similar to the following ones. The *Madres* were women primarily “…content with their absorption in the family and household and expressing little interest in the world beyond” (Bouvard, 1994, 65). They lacked formal education because in a male dominated society (like Argentina was during the *Madres*’ younger age), only men went to school (Bouvard, 1994, 65). When their sons and daughters disappeared, the *Madres* were the first ones to leave the house to go searching for them because their husbands had to work. The *Madres* encountered each other as they were looking for their sons and daughters in the “…offices and security buildings of the security forces, in the courts and the police commissioners, in hospitals and prisons (Calvera 1990, 62, quoted in Radcliffe, 1993, 21 The development of a network can also happen as a result of what Jasper and Poulsen (1995) have termed “moral shocks”: the occurrence of an unexpected event that causes a sense of outrage in person so that s/he becomes inclined to political action (for example, recall my account of the *Madres*’ situation in Chapter 2).
Accordingly, a "...female community of resistance...developed within the specific geographical sites in which the military regime was active in exerting physical control and maintaining ideological hegemony" (Radcliffe, 1993, 107).

This partial story in many ways resembles what some of the Madres themselves described to me during the interviews. Most women remembered the feelings of outrage and sadness that they experienced at the time and many were also quick to point out that they had not met each other before their children were kidnapped:

We did not know each other at all. I remember the first day, when a group of us left a police station crying as a result of the lies that the police told us about our children and the way they insulted us. We all left and sat on a bench outside, crying, looking at each other (personal communication with a member of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, October 1999)

None of us knew each other, we were in the kitchen with the pots and pans, and from the pots and pans we ended up in the streets (personal communication with a member of Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Línea Fundadora, October 1999)

However, a closer examination of the initial formation and subsequent evolution of this network of women activists reveals some other interesting dimensions. First, the popular assumption that these women were housewives who lacked formal education and had little interest in the world beyond their home misconstrues the complexity of many of the Madres' biographies. Many of the Madres were professionals (e.g. teachers, doctors, psychologists) and many others were employed in the service sector. Many of the Madres (not just the 14 original members, but also those who later joined their ranks) were active in many social and professional organizations, including unions, neighborhood, church, and other civic associations.
The Madres are quick to point out that their first leader was “a serious activist, a Peronista from the founding of the party”\(^2\). When I asked about her life before becoming an activist, a member of Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora recalled:

> Well, I am a teacher. And I was very involved with adult education. That is the hard line of teaching, because you have a lot of minority students: Indians, domestic servants, street cleaners. I have always been concerned with questions that pertain to social justice. Of course, I was surprised and shocked by the disappearance of my sons. But I was very involved with issues of social justice from before, and my sons probably got that from me. (personal communication, August 2000)

Her very close friend, also a member of Madres-Linea Fundadora, agreed:

> Ever since I was born, I was involved with human rights issues. My father was a judge in the province of Entre Ríos [north of the province of Buenos Aires] ... I grew up knowing and listening about human rights (personal communication, August 2000).

Second, a lot of the women who did not work and/or lacked formal education did, however, know a lot about the world beyond their home. Most of them were the mothers of a generation of educated young people, most of whom expressed their progressive social concerns not just in the universities or union gatherings in workplaces but also within the home that they shared with their parents, siblings, and in many cases, grandparents. Also, like most of the population of Argentina, many women are of Italian or Spanish descent and many are themselves immigrants. Many left Europe with socialist and anarchist ideals that they brought with them to Argentina:

\(^2\) For a complete biographical history of the founder of Madres de Plaza de Mayo, see Arrosagaray, 1997.
"My husband was a socialist all his life, very much on the left. When he was 18, he ripped up his voter registration card right in front of the ballot box. When the conservatives were trying to force people to vote for certain candidates, he always would say "I don’t vote for these people". And my sons got that from him. My husband was raised to appreciate freedom. Because he lost his mother when he was a child, he was brought up by his uncle, who like his grandfather was very political. They came from Spain, they were Carlistas; so, they were already different. Then my husband used to tell my sons all sorts of stories, like how he and his family had escaped from Spain..." (personal communication with the vice-president of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, October, 1999)

Another Madre summarized the importance of the relation between biography and their activism by saying: “...look, there are many of us with a history behind, and that is helpful to explain how we ended up where we ended up” (personal communication with a member of Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Línea Fundadora, November, 1999). These issues regarding moral shocks and personal biographies and experiences are crucial to understand how the Madres could become a network of human rights activists at the outset. The fact is that although these women did not know each other, it was their different degrees of embeddedness in different kinds of neighborhood, family, friendship, political, ethnic, and workplace networks that allowed them access to information about other women in the same situation. Even those women who lived in rural areas and were more likely to be isolated were able to meet other women like them through networks of acquaintances. One member of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, who lived four hours away from Buenos Aires in a small village in the rich agricultural region of the Argentine pampa (she is the only Madre de Plaza de Mayo in her village), recalled:
I first met the Madres 23 years ago, and I found out about through a friend of my daughter, who had already disappeared in the city of La Plata, where she was going to college. Her best friend worked at a newspaper stand, and he contacted me. He sent me a small newspaper clipping about these women whose children had also disappeared and who were meeting in La Plata (personal communication, November 1999).

Some of the Madres became part of this network of activists even before their sons and daughters were even disappeared by the military. Another member of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, who met the Madres in 1977, told me:

I used to come and meet the Madres before they took my children, and maybe that is the reason why the military ‘disappeared’ them. I actually first got in touch with the Madres because of my daughter. It was her that urged me to join them. She used to tell me: ‘Mom, go walk with the Madres in the plaza, those women need the support of people like you’. And I paid attention to her, and then, those bastards [the military] kidnapped her (personal communication, November 1999).

In other cases, how and why the Madres met was as a result of their residential location and their embeddedness in neighborhood networks. A member of a group a Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Lomas de Zamora (a suburban community one and a half away from Buenos Aires) described her experience in the following words:

I was looking for my daughter in La Plata, the place where she disappeared. But I did not live there. I went to La Plata many times and I met some Madres there. But then I started to stay close to my house and to get organized in my neighborhood, in my church, with the neighbors who came to my house to ask me about the disappeared (personal communication, September 1999).

Several Madres recall that they were “recruited” in their neighborhoods by a previously unknown woman who started going door to door inquiring about whether there were other households in the neighborhood who had experienced the disappearance of a family member. The last quote reflects the experience of a woman looking for her
daughter outside her neighborhood, which allowed her to meet women from other places. At the same time, other mothers of missing people in the same neighborhood (women who had heard that this woman's daughter had "disappeared") started to come over to her house to ask her to join them in her efforts to find their children. At first this woman refused, but then she realized that even though her daughter had disappeared in La Plata, she was not going to be able to find her there, in a place that she did not know well and that was very far away from her house. She then accepted to join the emerging group of Madres in her neighborhood, as she realized that they all shared the same experiences (they were all mothers of disappeared children), regardless of where their children had been kidnapped.

The incorporation of this woman in a group of Madres in her neighborhood created a new linkage in an emerging network of Madres that was developing in a similar fashion across Argentina. Through her, a pre-existing, localized network (which in her case revolved around the local church community) became linked to a spatially distant social network (in La Plata) because of the disappearance of a daughter. This woman experienced different degrees of embeddedness in more than one pre-existing network. Her multiple embeddedness, however, created overlapping ties that provided members with more opportunities for accessing information about others similar to them.

Embeddedness in pre-existing networks and overlapping ties allowed many Madres to access information about each other, and a shared feeling of pain acted as a unifying factor in the process of network building. The development of these initial ties, however, does not explain how women who had unexpectedly become human rights activists were able to become and sustain a group of activists called Madres de Plaza de
Other processes need to be considered to explain how the initial embeddedness of the *Madres* in a loose network of grieving mothers became stronger, and how the *Madres* developed *embedded ties* capable of sustaining a network of increasing territorial scope over time. I suggest that it is the cognitive and emotional foundations of the embeddedness process that need to be examined in more detail.

Meeting each other through different kinds of pre-existing and overlapping networks, women from different neighborhoods started to realize that they were not alone in their search for their missing sons and daughters. This happened first in Buenos Aires and immediately after in other different cities throughout the country. A collective identification as grieving mothers who nevertheless had the strength to confront the government in their search for answers began to develop among the women. As I have already shown at the beginning of this chapter, the initial meetings of women in the *Plaza de Mayo* in Buenos Aires were crucial for the formation of a large network of activist mothers. Even women who were not recruited or who had no other prior contact with the *Madres* came to the *Plaza* spontaneously to meet others in their same situation. This was particularly the case for women who were coming to Buenos Aires from the provinces in the “interior” of the country with the hope that in the capital they would find the answers that nobody was willing to give them in their own towns and cities. The *Plaza de Mayo* became a central gathering place that allowed for the formation of a more stable network in which women became strongly embedded as they developed emotional bonds. One of the *Madres* recalls:
When I joined [the] Madres I realized I was not the only one. It was beautiful because I began to share, and there is nothing better than that. Alone one cannot accomplish anything; one has to get together to share joy and pain (personal communication, September 1999).

This narrative, charged with emotional overtones, has much in common with those of many other women who identify as Madres de Plaza de Mayo across Argentina. Additionally, many of the Madres’ narratives are filled with references to issues of geographic distance, of meeting distant others who at the same time felt “close” and “connected” (for example, see this chapter’s opening quote). Many Madres today recall meeting women who had traveled many hours, even days, by bus and train, from distant places in Argentina, just to be in the Plaza de Mayo to meet other women like them, to find answers, and more importantly, to find comfort and support. One of the original 14 members recalls:

Unfortunately, each week the meeting in the Plaza was getting bigger and bigger. I say unfortunately because that is when I began realizing how widespread the problem was. First it was Madres from the interior of the province of Buenos Aires, then it was Madres from everywhere in the country (personal communication, September 1999).

Soon after they arrived in Buenos Aires, many women realized they were not going to get any immediate answers from the government about their missing children. Some of the women who had traveled long distances soon felt the need to return to their hometowns to take care of their families. Many others did not have money for more than a few weeks’ stay in the city:
Everything in Argentina is so centralized in the capital, here in Buenos Aires, so Madres from everywhere started to come here. And we began meeting each other, and then all of a sudden we were friends, and then family. But many of us could not stay, or could not come back to Buenos Aires often, and had to go back (personal communication, September 1999).

These circumstances could have been sufficient to force the dissolution of a fragile newly formed network in which activists were developing embedded ties. The only contacts that most of these women had with each other were a few encounters in the Plaza de Mayo under the watchful eye of the police, as well as some secret meetings at churches and cafes. However, the few initial encounters were sufficient for the development of a network of embedded ties where emotions played a primary role.

Much of what sustained the network during times of government repression has to be understood in terms of emotional ties, that is, the development of a feeling of belonging to a larger network of women, from different places in the country, sharing the same grievances:

We stayed together because we were desperate and we were the only ones who understood what was happening to us. We met each other; desperate...a desperate mother can do anything for her children (personal communication with a member of Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora, August 2000).

It was these emotional bonds that became embedded in a new and spatially disparate network. These embedded ties were responsible for the sustainability of the network, when the network was extremely loose and uncoordinated because there were no officially organized Madres' chapters across the country. For example, according to
archival records from both the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora, the majority of the Madres' chapters across the country were "founded" or "officially organized" from the early to the mid 1980s (see chapter 2). However, there were Madres de Plaza de Mayo across Argentina since 1977, at least three years before most of the archival records indicate. In the city of Mar del Plata, women already identified as Madres de Plaza de Mayo in meetings they held in the metropolitan cathedral during 1977, even though the foundational act for this chapter is dated October 1984. Mothers of the disappeared in Mendoza first traveled to Buenos Aires in 1978 and immediately felt a connection and began identifying with the women in Buenos Aires, but they did not become an official chapter until 1982 (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1986, 18). In Tucumán, women officially became Madres in 1981 even though they had been meeting since 1980 (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1997a, 13).

Especially significant about the development of this network of women activists is the little contact and interaction among most participants (except for a few leaders and very active members) during the crucial periods of the network formation. "Stronger" ties (measured as they usually are in the economic sociology literature, in terms of frequency of contacts) did not develop until much later, when the Madres became an "official" social movement organization and leaders in the organization based in Buenos Aires began making conscious efforts to reunite members from all over the country every so often and in different places.

The efforts to get Madres across Argentina together were more about trying to force a formal organizational structure over a network of embedded emotional ties than
about trying to sustain the network because of fear of its dissolution. The Madres' network was already self-sustaining because women shared both the pain of having lost their children as well as the joy and strength that came about as the result of having found others like them. It was actually the emotional content of the bonds among women that permitted the expansion of the network and the addition of new members.

For women who met the Madres for the first time, the developing network of grieving mothers acted as a support group where they found comfort and understanding. By being able to share feelings about the kidnappings of their sons and daughters with other women in similar situations, grieving mothers who were previously isolated and often misunderstood by their families and often publicly demonized by society at large found a place where they felt comfortable:

"[with the Madres] I have formed a new family. You could not even imagine how much we love each other. I became a Madre after being institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital for two years, where I was constantly medicated because of my depression. I was a mess because my daughter and my son in law were disappeared. All I had left were two grandchildren, a little 3 year old boy and a baby girl, just 34 days old, who then were also taken away from me" (personal communication with a member of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, October, 1999)

As women shared feelings and emotions, women also felt empowered, and such empowerment became the basis for activism. What was born as spontaneous groups of grieving mothers and what (at first) looked like informal self-help groups soon turned into a hotbed of activism and resistance, and later into a large social movement community within the Argentine human rights movement. The Madres felt empowered by realizing that they were not alone and that together they were able to act in ways they have never acted before. Through sharing feelings of sadness, anger, and frustration, and
talking about ways in which they could collectively confront the problem, women began
developing a collective identity: women who identified as mothers of the disappeared
who have met in the Plaza de Mayo or women who have heard about the Madres and
started to refer to themselves in such terms.23

The development of a collective identity allowed for the formation of groups of
Madres across Argentina. Women first began getting together as a result of the
friendships and solidarities that women had developed originally in the Plaza de Mayo
and that women were taking back to their hometowns:

The chapters in the interior of the country, they kind of just happened. Each of us came to Buenos Aires, and asked, “where are you from”, and then maybe some of us found out that we did not live that far away from each other. That is how it happened. The groups in the interior developed because many women could not come here often. It was not an organized effort...it was friendship I guess (personal communication with a member of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, September 1999).

The most active women in the Madres group in Buenos Aires sought to take
advantage of the strong bonds that have developed among women and that were the result
of the process of collective identity formation. In an attempt to make women’s activism
on behalf of human rights more visible and institutionalized, the Madres in Buenos Aires
tried to create an organizational identity for the Madres de Plaza de Mayo based on the
shared definition of “mothers of the disappeared” that was developing across the country.

In fact, the efforts of a group of Madres in Buenos Aires to officially name and create

23 As social movements scholars have already demonstrated, the development of a
collective identity is a necessary condition in the mobilization of social movements
(Melucci, 1996). The process of collective identity formation not only is transformative
in its own right but it is also “…a prelude to changing institutions and challenging
societal inequalities responsible for an undesirable situation” (Taylor V, 1996, 151)
chapters of Madres across Argentina have to be understood as attempts to capitalize on the existence of a geographically extensive network of embedded ties sustained by emotional and friendship bonds. Some of the Madres in Buenos Aires attempted to create a centralized network structure with more visibility and more face-to-face interaction that would lead to large mobilizations on top of a pre-existing network of wide territorial scope, where frequent contacts occurred mostly at a more local level, among Madres who lived in the same area.

By 1984, the Madres in Buenos Aires were adamant in their efforts to incorporate local groups into their organization. For example, it was this year that groups of women in San Juan and Santa Fé were asked to finally decide whether or not they would join the organization (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1984a). Not joining would have effectively meant that women in these cities could not refer to themselves "officially" as Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Similarly, whereas on the one hand women in Buenos Aires claimed that the incorporation of groups of Madres in the interior would not threaten the independence of such local groups, in actuality the control of the network was becoming increasingly centralized in Buenos Aires. For example, the groups of Madres incorporated to the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo were immediately required to communicate or work with other human rights groups only if and according to the decisions of a commission of Madres from (and based in) Buenos Aires (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1984b).

These efforts would become crucial by 1986, when the original organization split in two and the two current formal organizations of Madres came into existence (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Línea...
Most Madres in the interior of the country did not understand the division, and many remain unclear about it through the present, because their identity as Madres was independent of the formal organizational structures; rather, their identity was embedded in a network of shared feelings and emotions. According to a current active member of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, this feeling is shared among many of the women:

“I think it is really a shame that there are two lines of Madres now. Because we are the same and we walk together every week. Women from both sides, we don’t feel any difference. We have been friends forever. It is the leaders. But I do not care. If any of the groups mobilizes, organizes a demonstration or other public activity, I always go. I do not care [what organization they are from] because we all share the same problem. We all started together in this very same place, and by the time the division happened we had been together for so many years that I would never have a problem with the other women. It was the commission and leaders that separated. Not us.” (personal communication, October, 1999)

Despite the existence of formal organizational structures, the Madres network across Argentina (especially outside Buenos Aires) has never been bound by organizational boundaries or the geographic location of formal chapters of Madres of either of the two organizations. Today, it is possible to find women who refer to themselves as Madres de Plaza de Mayo but who do not belong to either of the two organizations and are not recognized by the two organizations as “official Madres de Plaza de Mayo”.

The emotional and cognitive dimension of the network fostered early cohesion and sustained the network more than 20 years through the present. Today, as death and

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24 I explore the issue of division and conflict among the Madres in detail in Chapter 5.
health problems among the Madres have reduced membership in their movement community, the handful of remaining active members draw much of their energy and commitment to the organizations from the belief that they represent and belong to a large network that operates at the national level, united by the shared feelings and identities that they developed over the years. This emotional dimension of the network, and the meanings that each member attaches to it, helps explain how it is possible for the two organizations to sustain chapters in different localities with only a handful of active members, and still make a significant impact in terms of visibility and political pressure in local communities. Much of the rest of society (from local politicians to the general public) also believes that the Madres represent a large network of activists across the country because the Madres have been visible and the emotional side of their struggle has resonated with the academics, activists, and decision makers and has made headlines numerous times.

3.5-Connecting embeddedness, geography, and the different dimensions of the Madres’ network

On the one hand and at first glance, the sustainability of the “official” structure of the network (what can be discerned and reconstructed from historical records in terms of interactions among members, for example) seems to have depended on the embeddedness of the network in a particular locality. For example, much of the history of the Madres has been written with reference to their activities in Buenos Aires. This notion comes as
the result of the importance of the Plaza de Mayo, which from the first days of the Madres' activities became a place that provided them not only with a name but also with certain advantages in terms of public appeal and visibility (see Chapter 3).

On the other hand, if we consider the emotional and cognitive dimensions of the network (related to relations among members that are sustained as a result of shared feelings and identities), we find that embedded ties among members were never dependent on a locality or on geographic proximity. The Madres have always been embedded in a network that goes beyond those localities in which the two formal Madres' organizations have had organized official chapters. On the other hand, as I elaborate in the next chapter, the Plaza de Mayo and other squares have been important for the Madres because they have always been specific "places for representation" (Mitchell, 1996) for a much larger submerged network of activists (Melucci, 1996) who operated across the country. Thus, even though plazas are places of crucial symbolic importance for the sustainability of the network, the existence of mass mobilization of Madres in plazas across Argentina does not represent the actual geographical extent of the network in which women became and remain embedded today. A case in point is the fact that there have been several locations where gatherings in plazas never became a weekly practice (mostly because of a harsh local political climate), even despite efforts of Madres in Buenos Aires to organize such activities. Why is it, then, that in the case of the Madres "locality" has not been as important as "place" for the formation and sustainability of their network? What exactly is the relation between geography and embeddedness?
First, embeddedness for the Madres has always been a geographically flexible network process because the territorial scope of their network has varied over time, often materializing or becoming more “visible” in particular places, but always depending on the existence of embedded ties of strong emotional and cognitive content that operated across space and that were born of non-locality dependent processes. In other words, the Madres network is both a social movement community and an imagined community (Anderson, 1991) of embedded ties with a submerged and changing geography that is difficult to relate to a circumscribed territory.

Second, the fact that the Madres’ embeddedness has not been localized opens geographic inquiry beyond a Cartesian perspective. For the Madres, the problem of making their network visible, of finding a geographic expression or a “place” for a network that in actuality did not depend on any one particular locality, has always been important strategically. In reality, it has been a task that occupied the minds of leaders and more highly active members of both Madres organizations over the years. For example, after the division of the original group into two separate organizations, much of the Madres’ effort has consisted of trying to make visible at the “ground level” the geography of a network of embedded ties that operates mostly at the emotional and cognitive level. This is the reason why leaders among the Madres were so adamant in promoting the practice of weekly marches in squares across the country once a formal organization of Madres de Plaza de Mayo was created. As I will show in detail in the next chapter, these efforts “paid off” over time because weekly marches in squares began reinforcing a feeling of proximity among women and helped sustain the network. In fact, the higher levels of visibility that the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo enjoys over
Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora today may very well be the result of the former group’s higher success in making visible the geography of their emotional and cognitive network at the ground level. Over the years, leaders of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo have strategically used the existence of a network of embedded ties based on emotions and friendship to enlarge their ground level network by recruiting Madres and thus overcome the limitations produced by the division of the original Madres organization.

In sum, my suggestion is that the network in which these activists remain embedded today indeed acts as a place that is not bounded by geographic scales or territorial boundaries (i.e., not a locality), but rather an open and meaningful place that is filled with emotions and feelings of closeness and proximity, and that materializes in designated places in different localities across the country every week. In other words, even though the Madres’ embeddedness has not been dependent on relations of proximity among members or on their association in one particular locality, there is still an important geographic dimension to this process: as I will show in the next chapter, the integration of Madres in a network of large territorial scope has been aided by their periodic placement of practices (Amin, 2000) in different plazas across Argentina that together and symbolically, act as one place.

3.6-Discussion: networks and the geographies of embeddedness

The case of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo illustrates that embeddedness is not necessarily a process dependent on relations of geographic proximity and that embedded ties in a network can operate across space and geographic scales. Most network analyses
to date have focused on analysis of the “ground level”, material dimensions of networks (such as frequency of interaction or “strong ties” among actors in a network). As a result, geographers (and less explicitly, sociologists, political scientists and other scholars interested in networks) have had a tendency to associate embeddedness with the local or locality specific manifestations of network relations. However, limiting our research efforts to an examination of the material, ground level dimensions of networks at the local level can misconstrue the way network processes such as embeddedness operate, as critical network relations that are less visible and that function at different levels are ignored. Furthermore, attention to these less visible dimensions of network relations can provide revealing insights about the geography of embeddedness. My focus in this analysis of the emergence of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* has been on the emotional side of network relations to uncover the different ways in which network relations are built and sustained.

As the case of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* reveals, network embeddedness can be sustained through emotive and symbolic embedded ties. Embedded ties of these characteristics, in turn, can enable or constrain further expansion and the sustainability or dissolution of more visible aspects of network relations. In the case of the *Madres*, the development of embedded ties based on shared experiences of pain and other grievances, on mutual friendships, and on a collective identification of members as mothers of victims of state terrorism, became the basis for the organization of a visible network of women/human rights activists of wide territorial scope.

The case of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* also reveals that it is possible to develop more nuanced analyses of embeddedness that neither overemphasize nor
downplay the role of geography. Analysis of the cultural dimensions of network processes can render visible geographies of embeddedness that are not dependent on proximity in a locality but rather geographically flexible and variable.

As I have shown, place does play a crucial role in sustaining embeddedness, although the main issue is face-to-face contact and symbolic proximity rather than bound local social tradition. In the case of the Madres, local interactions fostered early cohesion even though the Madres' embeddedness in the network was not dependent on a specific locality. Plazas in different cities, towns, and villages were key places where women met, shared feelings, developed friendships, designed strategies for future mobilization, rendered the network visible to the general public. More importantly, plazas also fostered feelings of proximity and cohesion.

This demonstrates that the relation between embeddedness and place is more relevant than the connection between embeddedness and locality that is typically found in geographic discussions of networks. As I have already indicated in Chapter 2, the spatial dispersion of a social network does not necessarily come at the expense of the importance of place if "place" is understood in a relational, networked and open fashion and in relation to its more subjective and experiential dimensions, or as Amin (2000) puts it, as the spatio-temporalisation of associational networks. This difference in the conceptualization of place is relevant if one is to critically understand the geographic dimensions of embeddedness. The feeling of proximity that the Madres achieve by meeting in plazas across the country suggest that their sustained embeddedness has to a large extent been dependent on a place, though such place is not bounded but rather experiential, open, and networked.
The case of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* also points to interesting ways in which we can think about the geography of social networks in general. An analysis of the emotional dimensions of network processes shows that actors’ (individuals, groups, organizations) perceptions of belonging to, and of participating in, social networks do not always match their actual participation in the social networks of their daily life. Different relational dimensions operate simultaneously through social networks at all times (e.g. actual interactions among members, emotional ties, and symbolic ties) and this gives rise to complex network geographies.

Symbolic and emotional ties are not necessarily bounded by geographic distances or locked in localities because they operate at the level of meanings and feelings. Different kinds of relations operate simultaneously through social networks but their geographic dimensions do not necessarily overlap and their geographies cannot be mapped onto each other one to one.\(^{25}\)

In this sense, the case of the *Madres* is also instructive. In this chapter, I have mapped and documented the extent of the *Madres*’ network by reconstructing the patterns of interactions among members and chapters over time from historical records. Although

\(^{25}\) I nevertheless acknowledge that the existence of territorially demarcated units at different scales (such as the “nation”, the “neighborhood” or “the household”) can enable or constrain the way in which symbolic and emotional ties are perceived and produced. For example, neighborhood activism and the creation of a place-based collective identity that accompanies it is often attached to a “sense of place” that stems out of the recognition of established geographic boundaries and the use of neighborhood names (Miller, 2000). In other words, network processes are affected by, and cannot be divorced from, the conditions governing the contexts in which they are produced and in which they operate. This indicates the need for further analyses of the way in which material realities can change perceptions and meanings and thus affect network processes that operate at the cognitive and emotional levels.
useful to illustrate the extent and evolution of the Madres’ network, the maps and accounts of formal interactions among the groups of Madres that I have presented are invariably incomplete. Emotional and symbolic ties cannot be mapped in traditional ways because they are geographically fluid and they are inconsistent with a geographic understanding of bounded space. However, as I have also shown in this chapter, these emotional and symbolic ties have always existed among the Madres, producing their own network geography, creating a sense of place, and actually maintaining and sustaining the Madres’ network over time. Failing to acknowledge the existence of such ties would misconstrue the explanation of the different processes that have contributed to the sustainability of the Madres’ interpersonal network for over two decades.

In conclusion, the case of the Madres demonstrates that inquiry into the significance of emotional and symbolic dimensions challenges our current understanding of the geographies of social networks. It reveals that non-material patterns and processes are critical to identifying the nuances of embeddedness over time and challenges us to re-examining our assumptions about the geographic dimensions of network relations and social processes more generally.
CHAPTER 4

ON THE PLAZA(S): COLLECTIVE PERFORMANCES
AND THE COHESION OF THE MADRES' NETWORKS

"Each day, thousands of women abandon the feminine sphere and begin to live like men. They work almost like men. They prefer, like men, the street to the house. It is not enough for them to be mothers and wives. They substitute for men in every place...I wonder if all this change has provided any solutions to our problems...Women were born to make homes. Not for the street" (Eva Perón, La Razón de mi Vida, 1954)

"They arrested us all the time. They beat us. They put dogs in the Plaza. We carried rolled newspapers to repel the dogs. They threw tear gas at us. We had learned to take baking soda and a small bottle of water to be able to resist at the Plaza. We learned it all, there, on the Plaza. Grown up women, who had never left the kitchen, had learned to do what so many young people had done before: struggle for that small space of Plaza, struggle for that small space of heaven that meant neither more nor less than what we have today" (Hebe de Bonafini, Madre de Plaza de Mayo, in a press conference in Buenos Aires, July 8th, 1988)

4.1- The Madres and the Plaza de Mayo: Field notes and first reflections

It is a sunny afternoon at the end of September. I am in the Plaza de Mayo in downtown Buenos Aires waiting for the Madres, who according to my information, should arrive in about half hour. The plaza is bustling with activity. Groups of office workers lay down on the grass, sunbathing during their lunch break and taking advantage
of an early spring day. Tourists walk around the plaza, taking pictures of the metropolitan cathedral, the *Casa Rosada* (the presidential office building) and the *Cabildo* (the colonial city hall). Children run around and feed the pigeons. Street vendors offer all kinds of “patriotic” Argentine souvenirs (flags, ribbons in the colors of the flags) together with Eva Peron and Ché Guevara pins.

As I look down, I see the emblems of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* painted on the ground: carefully drawn white headscarves form a perfect circle around the May Pyramid in the center of the plaza, reminding me (and the rest of the people in the plaza) of the circular silent marches that the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* perform every Thursday here. Around the headscarves, I recognize other drawings on the ground. They are the white silhouettes of people that represent the “disappeared” (Figure 4.1). As I walk further around the plaza and approach one of its sides (the one closest to the *Casa Rosada*), I see more silhouettes on the ground with the dedication “A los desaparecidos del interior del país” (“to the disappeared from the interior [the provinces] of Argentina”).

All of a sudden I realize that everybody in the plaza (including me, of course) is under the close surveillance of the Federal Police. Officers are strategically positioned at the entrances of most paths leading to or going through the square, carefully watching people walk by. Some police also walk around the plaza. School children run around a police officer and ask him questions about the gun he carries. The police officer simply ignores them and continues his surveillance.
Figure 4.1: Drawings on the ground of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires commemorating the disappeared. This particular drawing is dedicated to the disappeared from the provinces in the interior of Argentina.
I begin thinking of the Plaza de Mayo’s recent past and wonder what this place might have looked and felt like to the first fourteen Madres who gathered here on April 30 of 1977. I am certain that that day there were no children running around, no street vendors selling images of Evita and El Ché, and probably fewer (if any) tourists. However, I am certain that there were police officers and soldiers. In 1977, a little over a year after the military had taken control of the government and begun a campaign of terrorism against the civilian population, the Plaza de Mayo was a heavily controlled space. The Plaza de Mayo was not like most other squares in Buenos Aires, where children play games and old men play chess. Under the military government, the Plaza de Mayo was little more than a place for bank workers and public employees to walk through or around during their lunch break. The Plaza de Mayo was not a place where regular people would choose to go and stay for a while, either. It was a heavily controlled space where not even groups of three or four people were allowed. Since the Plaza de Mayo has historically represented the symbolic center of Argentina, the physical control and complete surveillance of the square was a priority for the military government. Jean Pierre Bousquet, a French journalist who was among the first to write about the Madres in 1977, wrote:

“...one of the main preoccupations of the military since they took power has been to exorcize the Plaza de Mayo. The whole central part of the plaza was modified to accommodate large flower boxes and fountains. This prevents that gathering of a crowd. One can only walk across the plaza along well-delimited paths. However, in the center, a large circular space has been left open around the May Pyramid...” (Bousquet, 1994, pp. 3, translation mine).
As I reflect on the plaza’s past, I realize that the current (democratically elected) government is still very much concerned with the control of this space. I look towards the Casa Rosada from the center of the plaza and I notice a heavy crowd-control fence that splits the Plaza de Mayo in two. I ask an old man sitting on a bench if he knows why the fence is there. His answer is simple: “It is because they are afraid of the people”. He is right. A few days ago, I witnessed a large demonstration of workers and unions in the square. The fence was placed to stop the crowd from getting too close to the Casa Rosada and to help police have more control of the situation. I then learn that the police have been using the fence for over a year because popular discontent with neo-liberal policies enacted by the government has significantly increased.

Suddenly, at about 2:45 pm, a group of city workers rushes down the square towards the fence and quickly starts to take it apart (Figure 4.2). They work frantically in groups of three, and a police officer walks among them telling them where to take each part of the fence. I realize that the fence is partly over the empty circular space where the Madres walk every Thursday. If the fence were to stay, it would prevent the Madres from completing their many silent circles around the May Pyramid. I wonder, then, whether the quick removal of the fence on this particular day and time has anything to do with the Madres’ weekly walks. Since the Madres’ walks have been taking place for over two decades and are publicly known, I suspect that the city, the police, and the government in general do not want to be seen as preventing the Madres from walking in the square. I am sitting on a bench next to the old man to whom I have been talking for the last 15 minutes and I ask him if he knows why there is such a rush on taking the fence down and moving it. He looks at me and replies: “The Madres are coming”.

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Figure 4.2: A city worker takes apart the fence that divides the Plaza de Mayo in two and prevents people from getting close to the presidential offices (seen in the back) in preparation for the arrival of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo.
At 3 pm, I see a group of old women emerging from one the subway stations located under the Plaza de Mayo. From different directions in the Plaza, I see other groups of old women walking slowly along the paths toward the center of the square. Two women stop to talk to the city workers who are removing the fence. They cordially smile at them and exchange a few words. I hear the men reassuring the women that the fence will be completely taken apart in a matter of minutes. I realize that, in the past 20 years, something has changed about the way the space of this plaza is controlled. Whereas the police attempt to control other popular demonstrations in the Plaza de Mayo by dividing the space and making it difficult to navigate, the presence of a small group of older women prompts the opening of the square and the removal of any obstacles.

The women get together in the center of the square and I see them smile, hug each other, kiss, and hold hands. They seem incredibly happy to be out here, some of them very emotional. They slowly start walking in small groups around the pyramid that sits in the middle of the plaza. As I watch these women walk together, I remember the advice given to all Argentine women by their “spiritual leader”, Eva Perón, in the 1940s, to “stay home to make homes” (see quote opening this chapter). I recognize that even though many of the Madres admire Eva Perón and her ideals, they have not followed her advice, at least not literally. Many of the Madres are probably concerned with making homes. However, as Madres de Plaza de Mayo, they left their homes 24 years ago, went out to the streets, and through constant resistance, claimed, re-claimed and finally constructed the small circular space in the center of the Plaza de Mayo as their own.
4.2-Inter-personal networks, daily practices, and the importance of place in sustaining collective action

My notes and first reflections of my experience in the field provide an entry point to begin analyzing the themes that run throughout this chapter. They situate me and hopefully the reader in the context of what the Madres have practiced and experienced every week for the last 23 years. By partially transcribing my fieldnotes, my intention is to provide a sense of how and where events that are relevant to the questions I ask in this study have taken place. As a geographer, the words “where” and “place” as well as the specific references to the Plaza de Mayo in my field notes are particularly important because my goal in this chapter is to analyze in detail how the Madres’ practices in specific places have contributed to their ability to maintain collective action.

As I have shown in the previous chapter, the trajectory of the Madres’ activism is peculiar. For over two decades, the Madres have been mobilizing to achieve justice regarding the human rights violations that occurred during the 1970s in Argentina. The Madres’ activism on behalf of human rights has taken place in a difficult context. Most of those responsible for the disappearances of thousands of people walk free and live as regular citizens with minimal fear that the justice system could do anything to prosecute them. This situation of impunity regarding human rights violations is the result of different events that took place in the past two decades. In 1985, the constitutional government prosecuted some high-ranking military commanders and the courts proved that the military had consciously and purposefully implemented a plan of disappearances and mass genocide. However, the handful of military officers who were prosecuted never openly recognized the disappearances and the existence of concentration camps.
throughout Argentina. Moreover, they never provided any information regarding what happened to the disappeared. Furthermore, two immunity laws passed in 1986 and 1987 pardoned hundreds of junior officers and finally, in 1995, a presidential pardon set free the few commanders and high-ranking military officers who had been jailed after the trial in 1985. For years, the explicit objectives of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* have been to have the amnesty laws declared unconstitutional and to see that those responsible for the disappearances face trial again. In this sense, the *Madres* are similar to other human rights organizations in Argentina that also attempt to come to a just solution regarding the legacy of Argentina’s dirty war. One difference, however, is that the *Madres* have chosen public mobilizations and public displays of activism as the primary way through which to ask for such changes.

However, the explicit goals of the *Madres* are just one dimension of their activism. As a contemporary grouping of activists that blends both political and cultural orientations, the *Madres*’ goals are not just instrumental. Regarding the character of contemporary social movements, Melucci has argued that the meaning of collective action “...has to be found in the action itself more than in the pursued goals [because] movements are not qualified by what they do but by what they are” (Melucci, 1997, pp. 269). Collective action can also be a goal itself. Thus, for the *Madres*, becoming activists and remaining together as activists through the construction and negotiation of personal and group relationships is inseparable from their more explicit goals regarding the struggle for human rights in Argentina. And in the process of becoming and remaining activists, the *Madres*’ symbolic connection with the *Plaza de Mayo* and with many other plazas across Argentina is crucial.
In this chapter, I am concerned with this latter, more implicit dimension of the Madres' activism. From a theoretical standpoint, my concerns here are the cultural and socio-spatial dimensions of collective action. As a geographer, my focus follows a theoretical tradition in human geography that seeks to demonstrate how places are constituted through social and cultural practices (Creswell, 1996; Pile and Keith, 1997) as well as how geographic dimensions play an active role in the constitution of collective action and social life more generally (Lefevre, 1997; Harvey, 1996). Related to social movements and collective action, the constitution of places through cultural and social practices often includes the creation of sites of resistance. As Pile (1997, 1) and other geographers (e.g., Mitchell, 1996; Routledge, 1997; Bell and Valentine, 1995; Miller, 2000) have argued, acts of resistance and processes of collective action more generally take place through specific geographies (e.g., streets, squares, parks, outside military bases), around specific geographic entities (e.g., the “nation” or the “rainforest”) and over a number of different types of geographies (e.g., urban riots, cyber-space activism via the world wide web).

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26 I specifically address issues regarding the Madres’ more explicit goals in Chapter 5, where I analyze conflicts among the Madres regarding their competing strategies for truth and justice about the disappearances.

27 The concerns with the different ways in which people relate to the places of their everyday activities dates back to the development of humanist(ic) geography in the 1970s. This broad intellectual tradition in geography is characterized by “...the heightened awareness of the intimate, emotional, practical, political and other attachments people poses with the places containing them” (Cloke, Philo and Sadler, 1991, 51). Drawing from the cross-disciplinary literature in cultural studies, geographers recently have renewed their commitment to the analysis of the more subjective dimensions of place and of the geographic dimensions of everyday life in general in the context of the “cultural turn” in the 1990s.
Following and building upon these existing theoretical insights about the geographies of collective action, my main argument in this chapter is that the development of a network of activists that spans time and geographic scales depends in part on cohesion, and that cohesion, in turn, can be partly explained in relation to the dynamics of place-specific (but not necessarily locality specific or dependent) social processes. At issue in this chapter is an analysis of how the experiential and subjective dimensions of “place” contribute to explain specific processes of collective action such as its duration and maintenance over time. Specifically, I want to analyze the daily practices that the Madres de Plaza de Mayo have performed in specific places for over two decades to address a broader question regarding cohesion and collective action: how does the performance of collective practices in particular places contribute to the maintenance of the social networks that bond activists together at the outset?

To date, the question of how networks of activists and social movements are sustained across space and over time remains to be fully answered. Regarding the cohesion of social networks and the sustainability of activism, scholars have considered locality-based bonds and local interaction to be crucial to the evolution of dense social relations, which in turn are necessary for the creation of a sense of community among activists. But the case of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, who over two decades expanded across Argentina and yet managed to remain a fairly cohesive network of activists, forces us to ask: how are dense bonds or “strong ties” (Granovetter, 1973) in geographically-extensive (i.e., territorially widespread) networks of activists maintained? When interpersonal networks are no longer based on a locality or territorial community but rather resemble the idea of an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991), are there any

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other geographic dimensions (e.g., the “experience of place” rather than place as simply a location or setting) in the strategies that activists use to sustain network cohesion? *What are some of the spatial imaginaries that contribute to holding the network together?*

To date, analyses of social movement networks have shown that strong personal ties facilitate the development of uniform activist subcultures and are important for organizational recruitment (Granovetter, 1985; Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994). In particular, cultural approaches to the analysis of collective action have used network conceptualizations to underscore the importance of communal bonds in the formation of collective actors (Melucci, 1989). From these perspectives, the strong communal bonds that join activists depend upon solidarities that develop around a broader social conflict as well as on the manner in which participants construct and sustain a collective identity and social movement culture (Snow *et al.*, 1986; Johnston *et al.*, 1994; Rupp and Taylor, 1999). Strong communal bonds are considered to be crucial in the creation of *social movement communities* (Buechler, 1990), which are defined often as “…networks of individuals and groups loosely linked through an institutional base, multiple goals, and actions and a collective identity that affirms members’ common interests in opposition to dominant groups” (Taylor and Whittier, 1992).

Interestingly, the literature on social movement communities provides implicit comments regarding the spatial manifestation of such networks. For example, in analyzing the importance of strong bonds in the mobilization of lesbian feminist activists

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28 As Rupp and Taylor (1999, 365) note, “…activists do not bring ready made identities—gendered, racial, sexual or national, for instance—to collective action… A collective identity is a characteristic of collective action that is constructed, activated, and sustained through social interaction”.  

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in the United States, Taylor and Whittier (1992) described lesbian feminism as a social movement community that operates at the national level through connections among local communities in a decentralized and segmented structure. The relation between social movements and communities intersects, in turn, with geographers' concern with the relations between the concepts of "community" and "place". Geographers such as Miller (1992) and Mitchell (1998) have indicated that "communities" (understood as a way of life based on mutual understanding) can be either localized—constituted in discrete geographical settings—or geographically-extensive—as is the case for the social movement described by Taylor and Whittier (see also Anderson, 1991). The interpersonal networks of Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina that are the subject of this study are another example of a geographically-extensive social movement community characterized by informal network structures that operate at a variety of geographic scales.

Even though scholars have recognized that social movement communities can operate through social networks that transcend the local, to date, most research devoted to explain the sustainability of interpersonal networks of activists remains framed in relation to localized networks. In general, there is a sense in the literature that territorial bonds or relations of proximity are important to explain cohesiveness among groups of collective actors. For example, social movement scholars have argued that smaller settings such as neighborhood churches are better at generating long-term emotional commitments among activists than larger ones (Jasper, 1997; see also Fantasia and Hirsch 1995). Even some geographers interested in the relationship between collective identity and locally based
social activity also have indicated that "...communal ties are generally, though not necessarily, strongest when the opportunity exists for local interaction" (Miller, 1992, 33, italics mine).

In recent years, however, other geographers (e.g. Ettlinger, 1994; Pile, 1997) have begun questioning the relation between social cohesion and local scale and argued that notions of community and their geographies cannot be assumed, even though studies to date have understood the mobilization of activists and social movements as being embedded in geographically circumscribed communities and territories (see Pile, 1997, 4). These statements are provocative because they open a window for posing new questions regarding geography and collective action.

Specifically, to what extent should discussions about the importance of "place" be limited to analyses of cases of localized activism and interaction? For example, if the interpersonal networks that link activists together are not localized (as I have shown it is in the case of the Madres in Chapter 3), is there any other way in which attachment to "place" can still be important to the sustainability of collective action? Is there a relation between a place (e.g. a square in the middle of a city, a park, a neighborhood), the subjective dimensions of such a place (i.e., the way in which the place is experienced by those people in it—which in turn may affect the character of the place itself), and the strategies that activists use to sustain a shared feeling of belonging to the same group (i.e., cohesion)? And if this is the case, what kind of conceptualization of "place" are we talking about? Given the socio-spatial constitution of daily life, what is the relation between "place" and "networks" after all? I argue that the case of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo is useful to answer these interrelated questions. As I show throughout this chapter,
the Madres' sustained activism over two decades provides revealing insights on the relation between network cohesion and place-based social relations and processes.

4.3-Network cohesion and the performance of place-based collective rituals

As V. Taylor (1996) has argued, the significance of social networks "...is to be found not only in how they cement bonds between participants but also in the symbols, discourses, stories, practices and other shared meanings that evoke the ties between people" (Taylor V, 1996, pp. 68). Thus, I begin answering the question about the cohesion of the Madres' network with an analysis of the different processes that have supported their construction and maintenance of the network in the first place.

My main point in this chapter is that places have an important function in maintaining cohesion in social networks. Specifically in the case of the Madres, my contention is that their gatherings in plazas around Argentina have much to tell us about how this community of activists has sustained activism for so many years. Elaborating this argument requires a synthesis of theoretical insights from a variety of perspectives because there is no readily available framework that permits linking statements about network cohesion, collective practices, and the importance of place. While both the geography and social movement literatures address issues that relate to the importance of place and of daily collective practices in relation to the mobilization of social movements, they do it discretely. Therefore, in this chapter I want to establish a conceptual link

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29 For a review about the lack of cross-disciplinary communication between social movement theory and geographic analyses of social movements and collective action (despite common interests and themes) see Miller (2000)
between these different insights. I construct such a connection by drawing from a body of
literature that is situated at the intersection of social and cultural theory: the
anthropological analysis of social relations and processes as *performances* (Schechner,
1985; Schechner 1988; Turner, 1992; Taylor and Villegas, 1994). Through an analysis of
the Madres' repeated gatherings in plazas as performances, my goal is to offer an
argument that clarifies the ways in which the symbolic value of places can be related to
the sustained cohesion of social networks.

In the social movement field, scholars have begun showing an increasing interest
in analyses of the everyday social practices or micro-level processes that generate
activism at the outset. The concern is specifically with understanding the practices and
other micro-scale phenomena that contribute to the mobilization of activists (McCarthy,
1996). For example, cultural and social constructionist approaches to the study of social
movements suggest analysis of the *collective rituals* practiced by members of different
groups to maintain their activist identities and social movement culture (Taylor and
Whittier, 1992, Jasper, 1997, Rupp and Taylor, 1999). These collective rituals are the
symbolic embodiments of the beliefs of a group that remind participants of their basic
moral commitments and reinforce group solidarity (Jasper, 1997).

The collective rituals of activists, however, can also be understood and analyzed
as public *performances*, or what the anthropologist Turner (1985, xi) referred to as the
"dramatic presentation of self in everyday life". Such an understanding of the daily public

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30 These approaches are also inspired by a symbolic interactionist tradition in American
sociology that focuses on the interpretation of the processes through which people attach
meanings to symbols (Berg, 1995). For an example of a theoretical synthesis of current
social movement theory and symbolic interactionism, see Taylor and Whittier, 1992.
practices of activists and other social actors comes from a synthesis of work by anthropologists and theatre and cultural studies scholars who have sought to understand social relations from a process-oriented perspective. Specifically, this work has focused on understanding performances as restored, practiced, or "twice-behaved behavior" (Schechner, 1988) and as organized and repeated action that takes place in a public space (Taylor and Villegas, 1994, 13).31

This approach to understanding public political activism as performances or the theatrics of daily life differs significantly from current understandings of performativity that draw from Judith Butler's non-foundationalist theory of identity (Butler, 1990). To date, several geographers have applied Butler's performance framework into their work (e.g., Bell et al., 1994; McDowell and Court, 1994; Thrift, 2000) to analyze the fluid geographies of identities. Yet, others have criticized this move because Butler's theory assumes a subject abstracted and detached from lived experience and from historical and geographical embeddedness (Nelson, 1999). Specifically, it has been argued that Butler's theory of performativity severely hinders the conceptualization of the relations between identities, social change, and spatially embedded, intentional human practice (Nelson, 1999, 331). Even though both Butler's theory and the anthropological work on performance share a similar vocabulary, the implications for research on social processes differ considerably. Whereas the anthropological approach to performance is fundamentally about social relations, Buttler's performativity is about individual identity

31 Public performances may or may not have artistic inspirations.
and is rooted in psychoanalysis. My predilection is for a more contextualized and socially and relationally oriented approach than a more psychoanalytic (and decontextualized) approach.

Examining collective rituals and public practices of activists as performances allows the research to focus on the dynamism of social processes as they unfold—in the same way that one might watch a play develop on stage. Understanding social processes as performances directs our attention to how relationships among actors develop, how conflicts arise and are negotiated or suppressed, what particular practices mean to the performers, and even how the performance of a particular ritual or act transforms, either temporarily or permanently, those involved in it (Turner, 1992).

Furthermore, as Schechner (1985) has shown, performances connect actors to audiences. This is important in the analysis of collective action because activism usually has a variety of multiple and simultaneous audiences: activists may perform for themselves (e.g., to negotiate a collective identity) as well as for others (e.g., to attract media or government attention, to convince and persuade others of the validity of their claims). Therefore, the connections that are established between performers and those for whom the performance exists make the analyses of social relations as performances even more powerful (Schechner, 1985, 6). For example, in their recent research on drag queen performances as a strategy for political activism around sexual politics, Rupp and Taylor (2002) demonstrate that the political and transformative power of the drag performances reached new levels when performers and spectators interacted and as the lines between

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the two groups became blurred during the performance. As I show in this chapter and in
Chapter 5, the relations between performers and audiences are also critical to
understanding the strategies of the Madres in Argentina.

In spite of this attention to micro-scale practices of collective action (e.g.,
collective rituals and public performances), to date, only a few social movement scholars
have paid attention to the importance of place as part of the practices. References to place
appear, for example, in Fantasia and Hirsch’s (1995) writing on the relation between
social movement havens and cultural production. According to Fantasia and Hirsch, “free
social spaces” (such as block clubs, tenant associations, bars, union halls, and apartments
in working class communities and workplaces) are “…meeting places where
communication can be facilitated without deference to those in power, representing
‘liberated zones’ to which people can retreat, spatial ‘preserves’ where oppositional
culture and group solidarity can be nourished, tested and protected” (Fantasia and Hirsch,
1995, 146). Similarly, in his analysis of a large coalition of different local antinuclear
groups who opposed the construction of the Diablo Canyon nuclear plant in San Luis
Obispo, California, Jasper (1997) shows that Diablo Canyon—with its beautiful vistas
and natural setting—had a central place in the history and mythology of these groups’
subcultures that contributed to their mobilization.

I provide these two examples not as an exhaustive list of references to “place” in
social movement scholars’ research but rather as examples that show that even though
references to place are present, they occupy a minor role. In general, references to place
are present only in relation to the settings or localities that facilitate the practice of
collective rituals that are crucial to sustain a social movement. However, other
dimensions of place that geographers argue are an important dimension of collective rituals (such as the way activists experience and thus re-create places in different ways, which implies a more open and less scale-bound definition of place) are absent.

I suggest that a focus on collective rituals as performances necessitates more detailed attention to these dimensions of place. After all, performances always require a stage (a setting for the performance), and moreover, a stage is designed, managed and even experienced differently depending on the kind and intensity of the performance (Schechner, 1985, 12). The same can be said of a place, since activists often act differently in different places or enact different strategies according to their own perceptions of their location in a particular setting. Here, the work of human geographers provides a useful avenue to further theorize the importance of place in the performative dimensions of collective actions.

Geographers interested in collective action have already indicated that cultural approaches to the analysis of social movements fail to consider how daily spatial interaction in particular places relate to the constitution of collective identities, or what the implications of the relation between attachments to place, identity, and behavior are for the outcomes of processes of collective action (Miller, 2000). To demonstrate the importance of place in the micro-level practices of activists, geographers have shown that social movements often re-appropriate places in different manners as sites of resistance and symbols of struggle and liberation (see for example Keith and Pile, 1993; Scarpaci and Frazier, 1993; Mitchell, 1995; Cresswell, 1996). The establishment of such sites of resistance (the Madres' first meetings in the Plaza de Mayo are an example) is important for collective action because “...the power of protest can be drawn from the
inappropriateness of [activists'] actions in a particular place” (Creswell, 1996, 165; my emphasis). Furthermore, even though specific places are important as the settings that facilitate the organization of resistance (as social movement scholars also argue), what is also crucial is how the material, symbolic, and imaginary character of places influences the articulation of collective action (Routledge, 1997).

These insights notwithstanding, I suggest that what remains to be done is to link geographers’ arguments about the importance of sites of resistance with analyses of the practices and other shared meanings constructed by collective actors to explain how networks of activists are constructed and sustained over time and across space. For example, when activists purposely appropriate public places (many times through disruptive and dramatic means), their objectives are not limited to communicating their claims to a number of publics in a very visible manner. Additionally, activists’ political performances in public places can also instill a sense of solidarity among members of a group (i.e., collectively taking action in an environment of risk and uncertainty can increase group cohesion; see Schechner, 1993). This point of connection, between the strategic and symbolic importance of places and the internal dynamics of collective action, is at the center of my argument.

By taking insights about the symbolic importance of place for collective action together with interests about the micro-scale processes that generate collective action at the outset, I want to show that the performance of collective rituals in places of strategic and/or symbolic importance (e.g., "sites of resistance") is an important strategy that contributes to the cohesion of activists’ social networks. Following in this vein, I analyze the sustained cohesion of the Madres’ network by paying attention to the micro-level
practices or collective rituals that women perform in places that they consider both strategically and symbolically important. Specifically, I suggest that the sustainability of a territorially widespread network of activist mothers has been in part dependent on the practice of group activities in plazas across the country. To put it differently, my suggestion is that the Madres have attempted to remain a collective through these place-based practices.

In the next sections of this chapter, I show how the Madres’ gatherings in plazas across the country have helped them to maintain a feeling of social proximity despite physical distance. Specifically, my suggestion is that, interestingly (and somewhat paradoxically), the performance of place-based rituals have not made the Madres’ activism locally dependent, but rather has allowed the Madres to maintain a symbolic proximity despite the wide territorial spread of their network of activists. Whereas I have already showed how the Madres have maintained symbolic proximity through embedded emotional bonds, I now analyze how the Madres’ have further recreated connections of proximity through particular collective performances in places of symbolic importance to their cause.

Additionally, I want to show that such collective performances have also contributed to maintain social cohesion among members despite the organizational divisions that I have already described in the previous chapter. Along these lines, scholars have argued that one of the important consequences of public collective performances is that they promote solidarity among participants while helping them maintain boundaries around their groups (Barnes, 1996, 20). I argue that the performance of collective rituals in places of symbolic importance has permitted the Madres to remain united at a more
personal, subjective, and experiential level of activism *despite* an organizational division that has been painful for many members their division. This is not to say that the division of the *Madres* has not affected the evolution of their collective rituals. Conflict is in fact crucial to understanding the *Madres*’ activism today, but this is an issue that I address in detail in the next chapter.

4.4-The *Madres* and their intimate connection with the plazas

4.4.1-Prelude: The *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* and the performance of motherhood

In her detailed analysis of the cultural politics of Argentina's dirty war, Diana Taylor (1997) suggests that during the last authoritarian government in Argentina, the military "engender[ed] and control[led] a viewing public through the performance of national identity, traditions, and goals" (Taylor D, 1997, ix). Specifically, Taylor draws on performance and feminist studies to argue that the military parades, the soccer games the military organized, and even the state-sponsored disappearances of people, were all part of a highly theatrical "public spectacle" put on by the government to both terrorize and silence the population. According to Taylor, the tactics employed by the military were effective in silencing civil society because they drew upon "the specific, localized images, myths, and explanatory narratives that [Argentines held] about themselves" (Taylor D, 1997, xi).

In that same study, Taylor also narrates some of the activities that emerged to resist the performances put on by the military. Specifically, Taylor sees the initial public activities of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* as a performance where motherhood was the central role. She argues that the *Madres* also drew on existing myths and narratives of
motherhood and therefore did not challenge the dominant patriarchal rules of Argentine society. However, according to Taylor, the power of the Madres' performance was that, by being out in the Plaza de Mayo, they brought motherhood out of the "domestic closet", showed that motherhood is also a social construct, and opened new spaces of representation for Argentine women (Taylor D, 1997, 185). In my opinion, and following my interest in the effectiveness of the Madres as a group of activists, another lesson that emerges from Taylor's study is that performing motherhood in the Plaza de Mayo contributed to the initial survival of the Madres because such practice was "out of place" (Creswell, 1996) and, therefore, it captured the attention of outside spectators (both national and foreign) who then offered the Madres their support (Taylor D, 1997, 207; see Chapter 6).

I begin this section with this brief review and interpretation of Diana Taylor's work because I also want to focus on the activities of the Madres as a performance. However, rather than focusing exclusively on the gender issues that infuse Taylor’s analysis of the Madres' public activities, I want to focus on the Madres' initial performing stage (the Plaza de Mayo) and the many other stages that they have occupied over the years to show the intimate connections that this social movement community has established with particular places across Argentina. In doing so, I want to elaborate on one of the main question of this study—how to explain the duration of the Madres' activism—emphasizing the geographic dimensions of the Madres' performative politics. I am concerned with the effectiveness of the Madres and thus my interest is explaining their continuity over so many years beyond their initial success. Finally, my goal also is
to empirically ground the theoretical points I developed in the previous section of this chapter and show the connections between performance, place, and the micro-dynamics of collective action.

4.4.2-The origins of a performance: choosing a stage

The Madres’ choice of the Plaza de Mayo as the stage/place for their performance/public mobilizations makes sense given the geographical and historical context of their struggle and activism. Plazas have historically occupied a prominent role in Latin America social life. In her study of the Latin American plaza, Low (2000) argued that plazas are centers of cultural expression and centers for everyday urban life where”...daily interactions, economic exchanges, and informal conversations occur, creating a socially meaningful place in the center of the city” (pp.33). The Latin American plaza provides a physical, social, and metaphorical space for public debate about governance, cultural identity, and citizenship. More importantly, as Low points out, plazas are arenas for negotiating social and cultural conflict.

The Plaza de Mayo in downtown Buenos Aires is no exception. Historically, it has been the center of social, cultural, and political life since the foundation of the city by the Spanish explorer Juan de Garay in 1580. The city of La Trinidad, which later became Buenos Aires, grew around a central plaza that functioned as the main market place (Figure 4.3). In 1806 and 1807, people gathered in the Plaza to celebrate the repeal of two English invasions to the city. In May 1810, when the Spanish vice-royalty of the Río de La Plata formed its own government refusing to accept the authority of the Spanish king, the square was given the name Plaza de Mayo. In 1816, people gathered in the
Figure 4.3: The location of the Plaza de Mayo in downtown Buenos Aires.
Plaza to swear independence from Spain. The Plaza de Mayo has always been the stage for major official and popular celebrations, from bullfights during the colonial period, to political rallies in support or against presidents and leaders throughout the 20th century. However, the major symbolic marker of the Plaza as the center of popular mobilization in Argentina in the 20th century dates back only to October 17, 1945, when a mass of people gathered in the Plaza to show support for Juan Domingo Perón as the future leader of the country (Sigal, 1999).

As I have already suggested, the military control and surveillance of the Plaza de Mayo was tight because of the symbolism attached to the place. But also given the symbolism that the Plaza de Mayo has in the collective memory of people in Argentina, it is no surprise either that the Madres chose to make their first public appearance in such a place. In his discussion of the geography of transgression, Creswell (1996, 163) argues that one of the unintended consequences of making a space a means of control is to make it a site of resistance at the same time. Therefore, for the Madres, the Plaza de Mayo seemed like the natural place, if not also one of the most dangerous places, to demand an answer to their questions about the location and condition of their missing sons and daughters. The Madres' first meetings, however, were not meant to be public demonstrations. The Madres merely gathered in the Plaza to exchange the meager information they had been collecting in police stations and military facilities. In fact, the Madres' first meeting did not amount to much. One of the 14 women who participated in that first meeting recalls:

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There were few of us, some of us standing, others sitting down. We each introduced each other, and told the others when and how the military or the police had kidnapped our children (testimony of a Madre de Plaza de Mayo, quoted in Arrosagaray, 1997, pp.129).

In the following weeks the Madres continued meeting, drafting a letter in which they requested a hearing that they later took to the Ministry of the Interior. As the Madres sat on benches in the square pretending to be “ordinary women”, suspicious police officers and security agents threatened them with arrest for loitering. For the police, it was important to get the Madres not just out a plaza, but in particular out of the Plaza de Mayo. One member of Madres de Plaza de Mayo – Línea Fundadora remembers:

The police used to tell us ‘Ladies, go to some other square, why do you want to stay in the Plaza de Mayo? Go to Plaza Flores, or Plaza San Martin, go somewhere else’ We said no, because this is the historic plaza of our country. This is the place where people always have come to ask for independence and justice (personal communication, October 1999).

The police forced the Madres to walk. And so they walked, hand in hand, talking, supporting and comforting each other, and exchanging information about possible strategies, under the watchful eye of the police. These forced walks (many times conducted on the perimeter of the square to avoid being arrested) were the origin of the Madres' marches that were to become their signature public display of activism and mobilization.

In the gatherings in the Plaza, women began carrying pictures and signs with the names of their disappeared children to demand the truth. The kidnapping and disappearance of one of the original and more charismatic members of the group (Azucena Villaflor de Vicenti) in December 1977 did not discourage the Madres, who

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continued with their activities. Despite the Madres' apparent organizational success, the police often disrupted their presence in the Plaza de Mayo, and the Madres were usually harassed and sometimes arrested. Many times they could not even get close to the Plaza de Mayo.

It was during the time when the Madres could not gather in the Plaza de Mayo that women decided to formally organize as a social movement organization. Ironically, by not allowing the Madres to meet in their own gathering place, the military unintentionally reinforced the bonds among these mothers of the disappeared, who felt that they wanted to stay together despite their inability to gather in public. When women came back to the Plaza de Mayo in 1980, they did it even in larger numbers, coinciding with the expansion of their network across the country (see Chapter 3). With the incorporation of the groups of women in the provinces in the years that followed, the territorial spread of the organization of Madres de Plaza de Mayo began matching and overlapping with the territorial spread of a large and informal network of activist mothers throughout Argentina. At that point, some of the more involved members in the Buenos Aires and La Plata groups (the two original groups of Madres) realized that if the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo were to become a national social movement organization, their recruitment and incorporation efforts would have to be complemented with other efforts that would ensure that the network of women activists would stay together despite physical distance and local differences in the compositions of the groups, competition for membership and support with other human rights groups, and political
environment. This realization resulted in some changes as to the way in which the Madres' public demonstrations were conducted: new and widespread performances were needed.

4.4.3 The changing dynamics of the Madres' performances in plazas

Ever since the largest group of Madres in Buenos Aires formally constituted the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo in 1979, the gathering of women in the Plaza de Mayo began taking on different characteristics. If at the beginning the gatherings in the Plaza were more spontaneous and less structured, over time, women began adding some patterns of regularity and uniformity to the weekly encounters. This is a critical starting point to begin understanding the strategic value of the Madres' gatherings in the Plaza de Mayo. According to Schechner (1985), patterns of regularity and uniformity are often related to a particular performance text. In this sense, there is no doubt that, over time, the Madres adopted and began following a script that drew upon the repetition and accumulation of certain collective practices.

First, there was the adoption of a regular day. The first encounter in the Plaza de Mayo had taken place on a Saturday, but women soon realized that if they were to have any impact in terms of visibility, they would need to meet during a weekday, when banks in the financial district near the Plaza and all public offices in the area were open for business. After discarding Friday for reasons of superstition, the women settled for Thursdays as the day in which they would continue to meet regularly.

Second, women had been meeting in different places around the Plaza, and in particular at the end closer to presidential palace, close to a large monument dedicated to
one of Argentina’s several military heroes. When the police forced the women to walk after their first encounters, the Madres slowly gravitated towards the center of the square. The empty circular space around the pyramid that sits in the middle of the Plaza de Mayo provided an open space where the Madres could walk without interruptions. They began walking in pairs, hand in hand, so as not to form a crowd. But since each pair of women followed another one from behind, the women kept feeling close to each other. This arrangement was the origin of the Madres’ circular marches in the Plaza de Mayo. From the beginning, the leaders of the group emphasized that their performances were not meaningless walks around a monument. According to the Madres, their weekly presence in the Plaza had a symbolic meaning for all the women who participated:

We don’t like when somebody calls ‘rounds’ to what we do [in the Plaza]. We do not call them rounds; we call them marches. The meaning of a round is to go around in circles over the same [place or thing]. A march, instead, is marching towards something. And we, the Madres, believe that, even if in circles, we are marching towards something (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo. 1995, pp. 8-9).

Finally, also adding to the patterns of regularity, women wanted to be able to identify each other and later wanted others to be able to identify them as Madres de Plaza de Mayo. In October of 1977, in the context of an annual Catholic pilgrimage from Buenos Aires to the city of Lujan, the Madres found a way to do it:
We didn’t know how to identify each other and not all of us could walk so many kilometers. Therefore, some of us decided to join the pilgrimage march at Luján, others at [the cities of] Castelar, Moreno and Rodriguez. We then started to think about how we could identify each other and someone said ‘let’s use a headscarf’. And someone said ‘...what if we use one of our children’s old diapers?’ We all kept that kind of thing as a memento. And so, the first day, during that march to Luján, we used white headscarves that were nothing else than diapers of our own children. And that is how we identified each other...a few days later, we realized that many people remembered those women wearing white headscarves who had been shouting and asking for the disappeared while they were praying (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo. 1995, pp. 11-12).

A regular meeting day and time, a specific place in the Plaza de Mayo and a white headscarf that identified the members to themselves and to others were key elements in the development of a collective practice that members continued performing over time. During the first years, the Madres’ gathering in the Plaza de Mayo also became strategic to create public awareness about the group. By meeting in the most important square in the country, right across the street from the government palace, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo attracted the attention of the international media at a time when the military government was deploying an international public relations campaign that portrayed Argentina as country where civil rights were respected and protected.

Over time, what became peculiar about the Madres' weekly encounters in the Plaza de Mayo is that such rituals never reached a climax. Those watching the Madres (e.g. the police, the media, etc.) began to know what to expect. The Madres would never run, attempt to storm the presidential palace that was just meters away from them, or even scream to voice their claims. What became characteristic of the intensity of the
Madres' performances was their use of monotony, repetition, and accumulation of certain movements (see Schechner, 1985) in a particular place to draw in participants and to intentionally shut out those who did not belong.

Women in Buenos Aires continued meeting in the Plaza de Mayo, but they were not the only ones. Women in the interior of the country also were meeting in the main squares of their cities, towns, and villages. For example, in 1978, Madres from La Plata began marching in the main square in their city (Plaza San Martín). As the network of activists Madres grew across Argentina, more and more women began traveling to Buenos Aires in search of answers. Once in Buenos Aires, women from the interior spontaneously went to the Plaza de Mayo to meet the mothers of the disappeared of Buenos Aires. Women began developing friendships through their interactions in the plaza, and when women traveled back to their hometowns, they took with them some of the symbols that the Madres in Buenos Aires had adopted. Mothers of the disappeared throughout the country soon began wearing white headscarves. A woman from the city of Concordia in the province of Entre Ríos recalls the origins of her local group of Madres:

In 1978, we had news that women wearing white headscarves and that the press was calling the 'mad women of the Plaza de Mayo' were rapidly appearing all over the country...soon after that we became Madres ourselves (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1997b, pp.17)

Over time, all the new groups in the territorially widespread network of Madres started to conduct similar public demonstrations in the main squares of their localities at the same day and time as the original group in Buenos Aires. In 1983, when the mothers of the disappeared in Tucumán decided to start calling themselves Madres de Plaza de Mayo, they began gathering in the main plaza of their city on Thursdays. The same year,
in the northern province in La Rioja, a group of just three women who used to meet regularly outside their church after mass began the weekly marches in their own local plaza. According to them, that was the time when they felt that have really become *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (*Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1997c*). The following year, in a national gathering of *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, the Madres signed a declaration stating that they:

...would work hard to promote weekly marches in plazas in all those places around the country where such activities are currently not taking place (*Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1985, pp. 15*).

Weekly marches in plazas in at least twenty cities across Argentina continued taking place throughout the 1980s and 1990s, for over two decades (see Table 4.1 for the specific location of the Madres’ weekly gatherings). To the surprise of many people in Argentina who have always looked down on the Madres’ performances in the plazas and believed the military’s narrative that described them as “mad women”, these silent marches in plazas across Argentina continue today (Figures 4.4 and 4.5).

Even after the original group of *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* divided into two separate organizations in 1986 and after that some Madres even became "independent", members of all groups continue to walk together in the same places at the same time. There are at least two reasons for this. First, most Madres (regardless of organizational affiliation) have always tried to keep the organizational divisions out of the public eye, as a problem that only concerns them and not their audience. For example, as I indicated in the previous chapter, the Madres in the city of La Plata became "independent" in 1996 but they only publicly acknowledged their decision three years later when the media
Table 4.1: Location of the *Madres*' weekly gatherings across Argentina. Table compiled through interviews and archival research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group of <em>Madres de Plaza de Mayo</em></th>
<th>Place of weekly gathering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buenos Aires <em>(2 groups)</em></td>
<td>Plaza de Mayo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Plata <em>(2 groups)</em></td>
<td>Plaza San Martín</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lomas de Zamora</td>
<td>Plaza Central de Lomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luján</td>
<td>Plaza Colón</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar del Plata <em>(2 groups)</em></td>
<td>Plaza San Martín</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayacucho</td>
<td>(main plaza)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Juan</td>
<td>Plaza Laprida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Rioja</td>
<td>Plaza 25 de Mayo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mendoza</td>
<td>(main plaza)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tucumán <em>(2 groups)</em></td>
<td>Plaza Independencia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ledesma –Jujuy</td>
<td>(main plaza)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuquén</td>
<td>(main plaza)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Fé</td>
<td>Plaza del Soldado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concordia</td>
<td>(main plaza)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gualeguaychú</td>
<td>Plaza San Martín</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosario</td>
<td>Plaza 25 de Mayo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villaguay</td>
<td>(main plaza)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.4: The *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* walking in circles in Plaza San Martín, city of La Plata, December 1999. The *Madres* regularly march holding hands forming a chain, sometimes talking to each other and sometimes in silent. Supporters usually walk behind the *Madres* or stand and watch from the outside, physically marking the outlines of the *Madres’* rounds.
Figure 4.5: Walking in circles in the Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires, October 1999. A small group of Madres begins the circular walk at 3:30 pm on another Thursday as they wait for other Madres who are arriving to the Plaza to join them.
began asking questions about internal conflicts in the organization. However, today, in both Buenos Aires and La Plata, women from different organizational factions \textit{(Asociación, Línea Fundadora} and "independents") share the plazas during their weekly demonstrations, even though their groups remained officially separate.

What is also perplexing about the Madres' silent marches on the plazas is the fact that, today, they no longer have the strategic function that they once did, when the occupation of a public place openly challenged the military regime that forbade public demonstrations. Today, demonstrations are common features of political life in Argentina, and therefore there is nothing novel or shocking about the Madres' marches anymore. In Buenos Aires, for example, not a day goes by without a demonstration of some sort in the Plaza de Mayo or across from Congress. Unless such public activities become violent, the media virtually ignores them. Furthermore, during the months I conducted the fieldwork for this study in Buenos Aires, the Madres' weekly marches in the Plaza de Mayo rarely amounted to more than sixty women, whereas in the past there used to be hundreds of women in the Plaza every week. In cities of the interior of the country, many of the weekly marches gather less than ten women. In the city of Ledesma, Jujuy, in northern Argentina, a single Madre walks every Thursday for half an hour in the main plaza. Similarly, to the media and the general public today, the Madres' weekly activities go almost unnoticed.

Why would the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, then, choose to continue a practice that in the present political context does not seem to provide the group with any tangible advantages? My suggestion is that for the Madres the number of women in the plazas is not as important today as it used to be, and neither is the fact that their weekly activities

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don't attract the attention of many spectators as they used to in the early 1980s.

"Numbers" (of Madres, of spectators) overall are not important because the nature and goals of the Madres' weekly gatherings have changed. Whereas in the past the weekly gatherings in the plazas were closely associated with the more explicit or instrumental goals of the Madres (finding out what happened to their disappeared sons and daughters), today they are more related with issues of group solidarity and survival. As I have suggested in the introduction, the Madres' goal of remaining together as activists is as important as their articulation of more explicit demands regarding human rights. In the process of sustaining activism, the Madres' relation with plazas across Argentina is crucial.

4.4.4-Performing collective rituals

The motivations behind the Madres' weekly performances cannot be oversimplified if one is to understand their continuity for over two decades. For instance, the public activism of the Madres is not merely a strategy for mobilization intended to satisfy one of the groups' main objectives (truth and justice about the disappearances of their disappeared sons and daughters). Nor are the Madres' weekly meetings limited to a strategy for their mobilization (e.g., to achieve public visibility and attract media attention) although some of the Madres do suggest that this is also one of their functions. The weekly gatherings are not events where women gather to plan further activities, either. As one Madre explained: "the Plaza is no longer a place for planning. We have long had an office to do that!" (personal communication, September, 1999). Instead, the Madres' public meetings in plazas across the country (and sometimes even abroad)
constitute collective rituals whose performance contributes to the vitality of a network of activists that otherwise would be extremely difficult to maintain together. Moreover, because public performances are always behaviors that are put on, practiced, or twice-behaved (Schechner, 1993), I suggest that the Madres’ weekly gatherings were not born a performance but became one over time, once the Madres realized the dramatic value and power of their collective gatherings in the plazas.

Interviews I conducted with members of groups of Madres in different localities in Argentina during their weekly gatherings indicate that, for these women, being in the plazas at a specific day and time knowing that other women like them are doing exactly the same in many other different places is a way to reinforce their feeling of membership in the groups. In my interaction with different groups of Madres, I witnessed how, through the weekly gatherings and silent marches in different plazas, women renewed their commitment to the groups, reasserted their shared identities as Madres de Plaza de Mayo, and showed their love for their fellow activists and friends. Consider how some of the women described their feelings towards their weekly gatherings:

The Plaza is our memory; our sons and daughters. It is being present and resisting. In the Plaza, it is as if we are constantly reuniting with our children and finding ourselves (personal communication with a member of Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora, September 1999)

For me, the Plaza is very important, not so much anymore as a place of resistance but rather as a place that I come to feel better. I feel very good and relaxed when I come to the Plaza. I used to hitchhike from my town to get here. Sometimes I go to Buenos Aires, some other times to the Plaza in La Plata (personal communication with a member of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, November, 1999)

I don’t think that we will ever achieve what we want, but I still come to the Plaza as a way to get rid of my pain (personal communication with a member of Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora, October, 1999)
In the Plaza I feel myself. In the Plaza, it is as if we are constantly reuniting with our children and finding ourselves (personal communication with a member of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, October, 1999)

As other scholars have argued, over the years, members of the different groups of Madres have constructed a collective identity based on a redefined idea of motherhood (Bouvard, 1994; Radcliffe, 1993; Taylor D, 1997). However, the sustainability of that shared identity has also been dependent on the feeling of belonging to a network of activists that even though it has become geographically extensive, still has its own gathering place. According to two others Madres de Plaza de Mayo:

The Plaza, our Plaza, is our gathering point. I will be here walking every Thursday at 3:30 pm until I die, because a Madre in the Plaza is a symbol of continued struggle, a symbol of our struggle for our children, and a symbol of our collective memory” (personal communication with a member of Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Línea Fundadora, November 1999)

The Plaza is our meeting point, the place where we show our compromise with the struggle for the 30,000 disappeared. The Plaza is our own space” (personal communication with a member of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, September, 1999)

Women across the country meet in designated plazas every Thursday, and some travel long distances just to do that. In some places the women meet at different times on Thursdays. For instance, women in northern Argentina meet in the early hours of the morning to avoid the heat of the afternoon. In cities close to Buenos Aires (such as in Lomas de Zamora and La Plata) women meet on their local plazas on Wednesdays and then travel to Buenos Aires on Thursdays to walk in the Plaza de Mayo together with Madres from Buenos Aires. In a speech given in the Plaza de Mayo, a Madre from the province of Santa Fé told the small crowd gathered around her:
If meeting in plazas across the country each Thursday is something that fills us with emotions, for Madres of the interior of the country like me the emotions double when we can be here, in the Plaza de Mayo. We feel joy because we are in this plaza, the plaza of the revolution, our dear Plaza de Mayo, with our 30,000 sons and daughters (personal communication with a member of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, May, 2000)

The words of this Madre de Plaza de Mayo mirror the feeling of hundreds of women across Argentina who travel to the Plaza at least once a year for the Madres’ annual “March of Resistance”. This event, which first took place in 1981, has continued uninterrupted ever since. There have been twenty annual events so far (although since the organizational division in 1986, the two Madres' organizations based in Buenos Aires sometimes have held separate events in the Plaza and thus the number of annual events to date is closer to thirty). During these events, Madres from all over the country gather in the Plaza de Mayo, setting up a campground in the middle of the square. They walk continuously for 24 hours around the pyramid, the exact place where the Madres from Buenos Aires march every Thursday. They take turns to battle exhaustion but they always make sure that a significant group of Madres is walking in circles, hand in hand, in the middle of the square. In these annual marchas, the Madres are joined by thousands of activists from the human rights, labor, women, gay and lesbian, environmental and other social movements, who come from all over the country to show the support for the Madres and take advantage of the large publicity and crowds generated by the event (Figure 4.6).
Figure 4.6: The beginning of the 24 hour "March of Resistance" of Madres – Línea Fundadora in the Plaza de Mayo, December, 1999. The Madres walk in front carrying their sign and activists from other social movements and political parties and grassroots organizations walk behind showing their support.
But as the hours go by and the initial enthusiasm of other activists starts waning, the real significance that this event has for the Madres becomes even more apparent. In 1999, I participated in the annual march or resistance in the Plaza, and walked in circles several hours with many of the Madres. The Plaza became virtually empty at about three in the morning as most people went home to rest. The Madres, however, continued walking, talking to each other and sharing their annual ritual in their Plaza. I remember leaving the event at five in the morning, after being in the Plaza for twelve hours and when the marcha still had twelve more hours to go. When I returned later that morning, the same Madres were there, still walking, showing and renewing their commitment to each other and to their cause. Even though they were tired and they were taking turns to sit down much more frequently than they were doing ten hours ago, none of them thought of leaving the Plaza until twenty-four hours of walking in circles in the same place would come to completion (Figure 4.7).

Even when some of the Madres travel abroad to promote their campaign or to participate in activities with other social movements, members continue with the weekly collective rituals. For example, the Madres have been known to select a square in the particular place where they find themselves, calculate and adjust for time differences, and then proceed to walk for half an hour around a monument or any other landmark in the square in order to feel together with other Madres in Argentina.
Figure 4.7: One Madre walks in circles in the center of the Plaza de Mayo during the annual March of Resistance. When this picture was taken, this woman had been walking around the monument in the center of the square for over 15 hours, taking just a few breaks to rest.
Over time, the Madres’ weekly marches have actually become trans-national collective rituals that render their network visible around the world. For example, one of the Madres told me that one of her fondest memory of a weekly march abroad was when a group of Madres gathered in the Plaza de La Revolucion in Cuba to perform their weekly ritual.

Not only have the Madres constructed their own lasting “sense of place” (Cresswell, 1996), but they have also re-created geographic proximity in a symbolic manner. Even though the square in Buenos Aires is the only Plaza de Mayo to which the names of the groups refer, all groups in the network use the same name—i.e., they have not replaced the geographic indicator in the names of their local groups to refer to the names of their local plazas. On the contrary, where it was possible, they have physically marked the squares in a similar fashion to recreate the feeling of being in the same place across many distant locations. For example, the Madres have painted the white headscarves that every member wears on her head on the ground of every square where they meet (Figure 4.8, Figure 4.9, and Figure 4.10).

Several women made me aware that Madres’ symbols in painted on the ground on plazas across the country:

You should see how beautiful the paintings are in La Plata. And you know what? It is everywhere in the country. I went to Mendoza and when I entered San Martin Park, I saw it: a huge white headscarf painted on the ground with the legend “Madres de Plaza de Mayo” I stopped so I could take a picture. Then I went to downtown Mendoza, to the main plaza, and it was the same. I have also seen symbols of Madres de Plaza de Mayo in plazas in Bariloche and in Neuquén... (personal communication, November 1999)
Figure 4.8: Paintings of the *Madres*’ white headscarves on the ground in the *Plaza de Mayo* in Buenos Aires, 1999. Today, the *Madres*’ headscarves have become a permanent fixture of the Plaza’s landscape. The headscarves are repainted every year, usually on Mother’s day. The presidential offices are seen in the background.

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Figures 4.9: White headscarves painted on the grounds in the central plaza of the city of La Plata.

Figure 4.10: White headscarves painted on the plaza in Mar del Plata, where the local chapters of Madres meet weekly. Like in many other plazas across Argentina, the paintings on the ground are a constant reminder of the Madres' performative politics.
The marking of symbols that represent the groups and their cause in plazas across Argentina is not limited to paintings on the ground. On a different day, one of the Madres gave me a walking tour of the Plaza de Mayo to show me the not-so-visible markings of the Madres in Argentina’s central plaza. My guided walk around the Plaza de Mayo revealed a secret geography that is only visible to the Madres, their supporters, and to those who pay attention to the little details and nuances of the Plaza’s landscape. As we were walking, we reached a large monument to General Manuel Belgrano, one of Argentina’s military heroes and the creator of the Argentine flag. There, among the many official plaques placed under the monument to commemorate the life of this man, I was shocked to discover a small plaque, conspicuously constructed in the same style as the others, dedicated to one of the original founders of the Madres’ group, that read: “Azucena Villaflor de Vicenti: we continue fighting the way you taught us. Madres de Plaza De Mayo”. The Madres placed the plaque some years ago, as a way to declare one of their own (the first Madre disappeared by the military) as a national hero. The Madres are happy to point out that even though more and more people have become aware of the existence of the plaque, plaza maintenance workers have not been ordered to remove it.

For the Madres, the absence of objections to the alterations to the Plaza’s material landscape is somewhat surprising because there is often a struggle between the Madres and those who want to erase their symbols from the physical landscape (usually those responsible for the upkeep of parks and monuments in the different cities). In one of my weekly visits to the Madres during a Thursday in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, I noticed that the white headscarves on the ground had been recently repainted, as they looked bigger and brighter than in previous weeks. One of the Madres explained that the
Plaza de Mayo maintenance workers are regularly ordered to polish the ground to erase the Madres' markings; that said, a Madre proudly explained that the Madres have painted and re-painted the headscarves so many times that it is now impossible to remove them because the paint has permanently penetrated the ground.

The identification of the Madres with the Plaza de Mayo runs even deeper. On another Thursday, I saw a group of Madres gather around the May Pyramid before their march. The women were silent. Some of the women were crying, others were clapping. I then saw how one of the women began scattering on the ground the ashes of a Madre who had recently passed away. Her surviving husband was there, the only man participating in this ritual together with the Madres. It was not the first time that the Madres had performed that simple but symbolically important act. As I talked to the Madres about the ritual I just witnessed, I learned that the ashes of many dead Madres are scattered around the pyramid in the Plaza de Mayo. According to one of the Madres, many of the Madres had decided before they died that they wanted to remain in the Plaza with their hermanas (sisters) and requested that their ashes be placed around the pyramid during a weekly gathering. According to one Madre, the ashes of at least five Madres de Plaza de Mayo lie on the ground in the Plaza.

4.5-Discussion: the geographies of symbolic performances/places

4.5.1-Performances and symbolic proximity

At first glance the gatherings of Madres in plazas across Argentina seem to echo geographers’ discussions about sites of resistance, or what hooks’ (1991) termed “homeplaces” (i.e., places that act as sources of solidarity and serve as sources for the
organization of future strategies of mobilization). True, collective gatherings in plazas across the countries have helped the Madres achieve public visibility in their first years and served as platforms where women met and organized. Plazas have been real “spaces for representation” (Mitchell, 1996) that allowed the Madres to convey their message and cause across geographic boundaries, from the local to the global.

However, the Madres’ rituals reflect more than the spatialization of resistance in specific settings. The continuity of these performances over the years and the way in which the Madres describe their experiences in the plazas suggest that their weekly gatherings are socio-spatial processes—processes intrinsically linked to a place but that are not limited or circumscribed to a locality—and symbolic practices that are linked to the micro-mobilization context (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1987)32 of this social movement community. My argument is that, in different ways, these collective performances are important dimensions of the way the Madres have managed to sustain a cohesive and territorially widespread network of activists for over two decades. How is this possible?

The gatherings in the plazas across the country at the same day and time provide members with a feeling of proximity that minimizes the effects of geographic distance. This is particularly important for groups of Madres that only boast a few members and for women who are far away from places where they can have face-to-face interaction with other activists. As I have argued above, the continuity of the rituals does not depend on achieving certain numeric threshold of Madres in the plazas every week. The

32 Micromobilization context refers to the link between the macro level and micro level processes that generate collective action (see also Taylor and Whittier, 1992).
performance of these collective rituals shows that, in the case of the Madres, cohesive communal bonds are not encouraged by physical geographic proximity of large groups of women sharing the same collective identity, but rather by a socially constructed symbolic proximity based on the group’s identification with a particular place.

Additionally, many Madres feel that the presence of their symbols in plazas across the country is important to sustain their activism. For many women, the paintings and other symbols on the plazas’ landscapes represent the material confirmation that their network is national in scope. This in turn makes women feel even more committed and compromised with their activist identities. Their marking activities are an additional strategy to sustain a geographically disparate network of activists. By adding symbols that represent the groups in plazas across Argentina, the Madres attempt to embody part of their collective identity in the physical landscape. As Jelin (1998) explains with regards to the relation between activism and shared symbols, activities such as marking and painting often contribute to physically situate a collective memory as well as unique personal and often non-transferable feelings of community among members. In the case of the Madres, painting symbols, placing plaques, and even spreading the ashes of diseased members gives activists a feeling of presence and continuity that contributes to the sustainability and cohesiveness of their network.

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33 I address the embodiment of the Madres’ collective identities and goals in the landscape at different scales in detail in Chapter 5.
Performances and their implications for the geographies of collective action

At a more general level, the Madres' collective performances are instructive for our understanding of the dynamics of social networks in processes of collective action. In describing the importance of social networks, social movement scholars indicate that the continuity of collective action is often related to the capacity of a group to develop and sustain strong inter-personal ties that provide the basis for the construction and maintenance of a collective identity and of shared grievances. My account of the Madres' performance of collective rituals in plazas across Argentina thus provides a compelling example of processes of collective action that contribute to the sustainability of social movement communities (networks) that extend across space.

Regarding collective action in general, we know that activists usually devise a myriad of strategies to maintain and negotiate a collective identity and a feeling of shared membership in a group. The case of the Madres indicates that such strategies often include using places (such as plazas) to maintain a network of activists that is territorially disparate. The Madres' decades long continued activism and mobilization is instructive because it provides strong evidence that in cases of geographically-extensive networks, activists can sustain inter-personal bonds by the practice of place-based collective rituals that appeal to symbolic uses and representations of places that are strategic to their groups.

Regarding the geographic dimensions of collective action more specifically, the Madres' weekly collective performances across Argentina indicate that while strategies to sustain communal bonds often benefit from place-specific social interaction—localization is not always necessary. Geographers who have begun researching the
spatiality of networks have already indicated that the level of maturity of a social network may mediate the extent to which locality-based interaction can be reduced and spatial dispersion can become possible (Ettlinger, 2000). The relation between network evolution and the possibility for spatial dispersion, however, does not undermine the importance of place. Rather, the material manifestation of such a relation reaffirms our understanding of “place” along the lines of current thinking in critical human geography, in which place is conceptualized as open, relational, (Massey, 1994) and in terms of practices that represent the spatio-temporalisation of associational networks (Amin, 2000) rather than in terms of settings, contexts or essentialized entities bounded by geographic scale. The findings about the sustainability of the Madres' networks are therefore significant because they add to our understanding of the dynamic spatiality of social life.
CHAPTER 5

CONFLICTS AMONG THE MADRES:
SITES OF RESISTANCE AND SCALES OF MEMORY

“We, the Madres from the Asociación, have clearly stated that we do not want to unearth bodies or bones [of the disappeared]. We want to leave our sons and daughters in those mass graves of 40 to 50 people; we do not want anybody to touch them. Because, if we do that, we then can continue telling the government that their obligation is to bring them back to us alive. The military took our children alive, so we will continue fighting with life, and not with dead bodies” (Personal communication with a member of Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, October, 1999)

“How one remembers the disappeared is a personal issue. For example, the problem of unearthing human remains is related to the religion or custom of each individual family. For some of us it is very important that our children receive proper burial. It is a delicate thing, personal to each family. It is an individual problem and it cannot be a collective one. That is why we disagree with the position of the leaders of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo” (personal communication with a member of Madres de Plaza de Mayo – Línea Fundadora, September 2000)

5.1-Conflicts on the Plaza

So far, my account of the collective performances of the Madres has explained how a network of activists has attempted to stay together despite physical distance, declining membership, and organizational divisions. The Madres’ collective

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performances are the material manifestation of deeper emotional bonds that exist among activists (Chapter 3). Moreover, the Madres perform such collective rituals in symbolic places to renew their sense of commitment to the groups, to reassert their collective identification as Madres de Plaza de Mayo, and to show their affection and friendship to each other (Chapter 4).

The Madres' performances are complex, and they mask, hide, and suppress tensions among the groups (and, as I will show in this chapter, in particular among leaders of the different groups). Interestingly, what one can and cannot see about these collective performances depends on one's position in relation to the performances themselves, because, as Schechner (1985, 6) puts it, the "...force of [a] performance [exists in] the very specific relationship between performers and those for whom the performance exists". During my fieldwork in Argentina, I actively participated in the Madres weekly gatherings in plazas across the country. During my involvement in the Madres' activities, I began to suspect that of all the multiple audiences for which the Madres perform (the government, the media, other social movements, etc.), the Madres also performed for themselves. As I got to know and talk to the Madres more deeply, I began to understand that, over time, the Madres had altered their performances so that, today, the weekly rituals also mark boundaries between two formal social movement organizations and are representations of the different goals and strategies of the two groups. This was particularly clear to me in those localities where groups of Madres from

34 I have already hinted that this is the case for the Madres. My analysis in the previous chapter showed that the Madres' performances contribute to their cohesiveness and sustained activism in general.

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the two organizations share the plazas for their weekly marches, such as in Buenos Aires and La Plata (two of the cities where I conducted much of my fieldwork)\(^{35}\). In those cities, even though *Madres* from the two different organizations walk in the same places at the same time, I witnessed how members of the two groups made conscious efforts to add new components to their performances in an attempt to link either individual women or a whole group of activists to a specific organizational affiliation. Still, the *Madres* in general were careful that these differentiating components of their performances did not damage the established image of *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* that their multiple audiences have come to expect after over two decades of activism.

Therefore, while in the field, I realized it was possible to analyze the *Madres'* weekly marches as the spatial manifestation of ongoing conflicts and disagreements between the two *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* organizations (i.e., conflicts at the organizational level of the *Madres'* network [see Chapter 3]). I decided I wanted to understand what it was that the *Madres* say about each other (either directly or in a symbolic manner) during their weekly performances. Having already understood one of the implicit goals of the *Madres'* activism (to remain together as a visible grassroots network of human rights activists), my goal now was to learn more about the tensions and ongoing division between the two organizations. Specifically, I sought to understand

\(^{35}\) In this chapter I focus on the conflicts among the *Madres* in terms of the existence of two formal organizations, even though I have already explained that there are several "independent" groups of *Madres* (see Chapter 3). The independent groups of *Madres* tend to agree with the positions and stands of one the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora* and often work in coalition with this group. Therefore in this chapter I treat the independent groups as a part of the *Linea Fundadora* camp even though such groups do not officially identify themselves as such.
what else the Madres do every time they walk in the Plaza besides attempting to maintain a feeling of unity and solidarity at a personal and subjective level. I believed that this would be the first step towards better understanding how, despite feeling united at a personal level, Madres of different organizational affiliation clash over the explicit goals and strategies of their activism, 25 years after their first meeting in the Plaza de Mayo.

What I learned from this personal involvement in the internal politics of the groups surprised me. I never suspected that the two groups of Madres would have such different perspectives in relation to the politics of human rights in contemporary Argentina. The differences began in 1986, when the Fundadoras separated from the Madres of the Asociación (see Chapter 3). But as I will explain in this chapter, the scale of disagreement between the two groups regarding human rights issues has escalated since then as the politics surrounding how to deal with the legacy of the disappearances and human rights abuses have become more complex in the past 10 years.

Today, Madres from the two different organizations disagree profoundly on everything from whether it is right to commemorate victims of past human rights abuses (and how to do it) to what the goals of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo should be—after society at large has already recognized that those who "disappeared" were in fact murdered by the military. On the one hand, Madres-Línea Fundadora believes that remembering and honoring those who have disappeared is a way to keep the human rights movement alive. On the other hand, the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo believes that remembering and commemorating the disappeared is equivalent to accepting their death and to putting an end to their struggle for human rights.
The differences between these two positions regarding historical memory (and the strategies for activism associated with them) are so great that one would never expect that women espousing such divergent positions still feel united at a personal level and, in many cases, remain good friends. The tensions between their different positions are so high that one of the Madres confessed to me that the idea of having a network of Madres de Plaza de Mayo united at the two levels (inter-personal and inter-organizational) again, though desirable, seems rather impossible today (personal communication, October 1999).

Learning about these differences through my personal involvement with the Madres also put me in a complicated position as a researcher. At times, my active participation and engagement with the Madres almost jeopardized the successful continuation of my fieldwork. Once I realized how deep these differences ran between the groups, and once the Madres realized that I was also interested in finding out and writing about such differences, the dynamics of my relationship with them also changed. This was particularly obvious during my participation in the weekly marches in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires. Madres from both organizations knew that I understood what their disagreements were about, and this posed a dilemma for me. During the collective performances in which I participated, I kept wondering: who should I walk closer to, the Madres from the Asociación or those from Línea Fundadora? Where do I position myself (both spatially and ideologically) in the Plaza? Do I have to choose a position or could I remain objective and spatially neutral?

These questions did not matter much because I soon found out that I could not conceal my situatedness. For example, during a group interview, members from Madres - Línea Fundadora told me (in an unhappy and almost disappointed tone) that they had
seen me helping Madres from the Asociación carry a loudspeaker during their weekly march in the Plaza de Mayo (Figure 5.1). For this group of Madres, my actions meant that I felt closer to the ideas of the Asociación regarding human rights issues and the "politics of memory" (i.e., how to remember the past and how to commemorate victims of human rights abuses and those who disappeared).

On the other hand, I was also thrown out of the offices of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo (by their president) once I casually revealed during a conversation that I had planned to visit the offices of Madres-Linea Fundadora later that day. For these Madres it was logical that I would talk to Madres of all organizational affiliation in the Plaza during the weekly marches—after all, they had told me that the Plaza is a place for everybody. But for me to go out of my way and go to the offices of Madres-Linea Fundadora after they Asociación Madres had treated me so well was a mistake and, according to them, betrayal.

Ultimately, I mended bridges via long conversations in which I attempted to explain to the Madres the difficult position of a researcher in situations like this one. Still, after these conflicts took place, I wondered… which group did I feel closer? With which position regarding how to deal with the legacy of the dirty war did I most agree? These are questions for which I still have no answers today. As I will show below, even though the positions of the two groups of Madres have well-supported and appealing points, they are difficult to reconcile. Indeed this may help explain why the Madres de Plaza de Mayo remain united at a personal level of activism but clearly separated and divided at the organizational and strategic levels.
Figure 5.1: Putting myself in trouble. The author is helping a member of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo carry a loudspeaker during one of the Madres’ weekly performances in the Plaza. Another Madre is watching me from the side. Being seen with Madres of one organizational affiliation often created conflicts with Madres of the opposing group.
5.2-Situating the *Madres'* conflict: The politics and landscapes of memory

My comments above help me situate the theme of this chapter, which is the geographic dimensions of conflict and inter-organizational rivalry among the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. I continue analyzing the *Madres'* weekly marches in the plazas as performances or "practiced behaviors" (Schechner, 1985), as I did in the previous chapter. My interest now is to look at the *Madres'* performances in public places as the *embodiment of conflict*. I do so specifically by analyzing the different discourses and practices regarding human rights and the politics and landscapes of memory that are embodied in the *Madres'* performances.

The analysis of group conflicts as a kind of social drama that gets played out publicly has a long tradition among social and cultural theorists. Cultural and social anthropologists and scholars working on theories of theatre and performance have shown that social conflicts can often be seen as performances in which multiple identities are played out and through which conflicts are negotiated and suppressed at the same time (Turner, 1992; Taylor and Villegas, 1994; Parkin, Caplan and Fisher, 1996). As I will show, the weekly collective rituals of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* certainly fit this model because it is during their gatherings in the plazas when the *Madres* attempt to negotiate disagreements that are almost irreconcilable. Moreover, what is interesting about the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* is that their practiced behaviors are also double performances, or performances within performances with compound objectives. The *Madres* gatherings in the plazas are directed to multiple audiences simultaneously; such audiences do not necessarily interact with each other but all play key roles in the development of the weekly gatherings.
To analyze the Madres’ performances as conflict from a geographic perspective, I focus not only the performances themselves but also the discourses and practices that produce conflict among the Madres in the first place and that allow for such conflicts to be played out in public as social drama. I begin positioning my analysis by building on the emerging body of literature on the geographic dimensions of memory and commemoration. This line of research seeks to demonstrate how different groups (social movements are a case in point) interpret and construct the past in different ways and attempt to legitimize their own version of history by maintaining and creating landscapes of memory or "memorial landscapes" (Alderman, 2000). In effect, the representation of memory in the landscape is often riddled with conflict. Geographers have already documented the types of conflicts that develop when less powerful or marginalized groups confront and/or challenge more powerful actors’ attempts to create landscapes of memory that reflect official or institutionalized views of the past (Azaryahu, 1999; Moore, 2000; Dwyer, 2000). However, less attention has been paid to conflicts about the representation of the past that emerge within groups of traditionally disempowered actors such as marginalized communities of different identities (e.g., ethnic, racial, sexual) and those who organize to defend them (e.g., grassroots activists and social movements) (but see Slater, 1999).

Because I am interested in analyzing conflicts among the Madres, my general concern from a theoretical point of view is with conflicts about representations of the past that occur within groups that organize around some form of “identity politics”. Specifically, I am interested in analyzing the struggles over the creation of memorial landscapes that emerge from the intricate ways in which representations of the past and
the politics of identity intersect. I focus on the geographic dimensions of these conflicts and pursue two broader theoretical goals. First, I want to extend the scope of inquiry of the geographic literature on memorial landscapes that often focuses on place-specific strategies for memory and commemoration (e.g., the erection of monuments and memorials, the preservation of buildings or of a historic site) to consider the multiple spatial scales through which the representation of the "politics of memory" (Jelin, 1998) unfold. Additionally, by focusing on multiple spatial scales simultaneously, I want to provide a more dynamic approach to the analysis of memorial landscapes, linking memorial landscapes to practices to show how memorial landscapes are actively performed. My overall objective is to show how different spatialities and performances contribute to validating or condemning competing politics of commemoration.

I suggest that the Madres’ conflicts and different positions about memory and commemoration constitute an excellent lens through which to examine the relations between identity politics and the construction and performance of memorial landscapes. As I will show, the Madres’ conflicts are expressed in an overtly spatial fashion that allows for an examination of the way in which different geographies are embedded in disagreements about the representation of the past—what I call the “geo-politics of memory”. Specifically, I argue that the Madres’ disagreements speak to a geo-politics of memory because the Madres clash over how to appropriately place memory in the landscape and over what are the acceptable and effective spatial scales through which remembering and commemorating should take place. Moreover, the Madres’ different
strategies for commemoration are visible in the landscape because they materialize at
different spatial scales and even clash during the Madres' public performances, when the
Madres come together in squares and other public spaces in cities across Argentina.

I organize this chapter in the following way. First, I briefly review the literature
on memorial landscapes and suggest some ways to connect this body of work with
current relational understandings of scale, place, and landscape in human geography. By
connecting these two literatures, I want to offer a dynamic approach to the analysis of the
spatiality of the politics of memory and commemoration. Then, through a comparative
analysis of the discourses and practices of the two groups of Madres de Plaza de Mayo, I
show how their different strategies for memory and commemoration are enacted at and
through different spatial scales in order to reaffirm or combat their competing views
regarding contemporary human rights politics in Argentina. As I will show, such spatial
scales range from physical markers in the urban landscape (such as monuments, plaques,
and temporary memorials) to imaginings of the "disappeared" that are represented
through public art (e.g., graffiti, murals) to the Madres' own bodies. Then, I show how
the Madres' weekly collective rituals in the squares act as performances that condense in
one place competing strategies that are otherwise enacted at different spatial scales. This
last point clarifies the ways in which the development of different geographies of
memory is integrally related to complicated and unstable politics of identity.
5.3-Towards a relational view of memorial landscapes

The past decade has seen the emergence of a cross-disciplinary body of literature that deals with the conceptualization and analysis of collective memory and commemoration. This literature shares a concern for understanding how memory and oblivion are socially constructed as well as how different groups attempt to incorporate or exclude conflicting interpretations of the past into the present (Gillis, 1994; Coser, 1992; File, 1998). A significant portion of this literature on collective memory has been inspired by the experiences of many Latin American societies that experienced repressive military regimes during the 1970s and 1980s (Acuna, 1995; Moulian, 1998; Hayner, 1998; Ogle, 1998; Burt, 1998). It is in places such as Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Peru where torture and disappearances that took place in past decades are still part of the present because activists such as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo continue their search for truth and justice despite government efforts to place these past conflicts in the past through amnesty laws or through the work of "truth commissions".36

36 Despite the benefits that have resulted out of truth commissions' work in places such as Argentina and Guatemala, activists to date have been dissatisfied with this approach to solve conflicts of past human rights violations. The problem is that truth commissions are usually ordered to document events of the past in an allotted time frame with the objective of finally "closing" wounds from past periods of violence. This objective only partially satisfies claims for truth because human rights activists in Latin America rarely have been convinced that truth reports tell "all" the truth. Moreover, since the objective of truth commissions is to produce a report that documents the past, come to a conclusion, and finish and close investigations, activists with standing claims generally contest the reports' results and attempt to keep memory alive in other forms.
Research on collective memory and commemoration, however, is not limited to the Latin American context. Scholars have studied processes of memory construction in a variety of settings (e.g., the United States, western Europe, the Middle East) and have also approached the subject from different perspectives. For example, some scholars have focused on understanding conflicts that emerge among different actors surrounding issues such as the authenticity of historical memory (i.e., how different actors clash over the "objectivity" of a narrative or other representations related to a particular historical event) (Delyser, 1999). Others have analyzed struggles over issues of the legitimacy of commemoration (i.e., who has the right to decide what should be remembered and how that remembering ought to be done) (Jelin, 1998).

Additionally, this body of work has analyzed issues regarding commemoration following different themes. For example, some scholars have focused on studying societal efforts and conflicts to establish "time related markers of memory" (Jelin, 1998), such as commemoration dates and anniversaries. Another growing approach to the subject of collective memory that is especially relevant to the case of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo centers on analysis of the spatial manifestations of commemoration. Research in this area has focused on analyzing the construction of physical markers designed to commemorate events from the past. Specifically, scholars have analyzed the conflicts that ensue when the built environment is modified to memorialize past events (such as nation-building processes and colonialism), or past societal conflicts (such as ethnic, racial, class, and other struggles). Studies in this area, for example, include analyses of conflicts over the naming of streets (Alderman, 1996; Alderman, 2000) or the construction of museums, monuments, and memorials (Dwyer, 2000; Moore, 2000).
Additionally, other scholars have focused on analyzing the relation between the construction of collective memory and the emergence of a heritage tourism industry that centers on "selling" historic homes, buildings, sites, or even whole towns as tourist attractions (see for example, DeLyser, 1999; Johnson, 1996; Azaryahu, 1999).

A common theme has emerged from these analyses of the spatiality of memory and commemoration. Scholars today recognize that attempts to attach single meanings to physical landscapes are fruitless because the built environment is always open to alternative and multiple interpretations (Moore, 2000). In fact, memorial landscapes can be seen as "materialized discourses" (Schein, 1997) that attempt to summarize a particular view of history into a single narrative. However, in doing so, memorial landscapes incorporate a particular version of history into the spatial practices of everyday life (Alderman, 2000) and are immediately subject to contestation because different groups hold competing interpretations of past events. Therefore, different groups often challenge the particular narrative embodied in the built environment and attempt to modify it so that their own version of history and of past events can prevail.

Although the literature on memorial landscapes has provided important insights regarding the often-contested material expressions of historical memory, the myriad ways in which commemoration is represented spatially still requires attention. Specifically, the focus to date has been on detailed studies of how particular views of history become embodied in single monuments, memorials, or historic buildings. Research has proceeded by focusing on an individual "site" or "landscape of memory" in a particular context, and more importantly, generally centering on a single spatial scale.
I suggest connecting research on memorial landscapes with current studies that explain how places and landscapes in general are related to social processes that play out both materially and discursively at different spatial scales. This would help clarify how different spatialities are embedded in the construction and maintenance of collective memory and memorial landscapes.

As I have already argued in Chapters 1 and 3, current views within critical human geography underscore the openness of concepts such as "place" and "landscape". Geographers today emphasize that "place" should not be understood as bounded in any particular geographic territory. Rather, a place is the nexus of a network of social relations that occur at multiple spatial scales simultaneously (Massey, 1991). The same openness can also be applied to our understandings of landscapes. According to Schein (1997), landscapes can also be envisioned as articulated moments on networks that stretch across space, or as nodes at the intersection of a number of independent networks of knowledge that represent competing sets of meanings. Such competing discourses, in turn, become materialized and can, for example, depict a landscape in a variety of ways (Schein, 1997). The open understanding of place and landscape is, in turn, related to a dynamic and fluid conceptualization of geographic scale. For some years now scholars have argued that spatial scales are not ontologically given or definable through its association with a geographical territory (Smith, 1993; Swyngedow, 1997, Herod, 2000; Castree, 2001). Rather, spatial scales are produced and should be understood as the arena where power relations play out and social conflict is negotiated (Swyngedow, 1997, 140).

These insights regarding the embeddedness of different spatial scales and discourses in the production of places and landscapes can be brought to bear on the
literature of the spatial dimensions of memory. Specifically, I suggest that one important
collection of this view of place, landscape, and scales to the memorial landscapes
literature is the recognition that memorial sites may articulate a series of independent
discourses that become "placed" in one particular site or event at a particular point in
time, but that are generated and enacted at different spatial scales.

It is at this point that the case of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo becomes
conceptually and empirically significant. I argue that the different practices of public
commemoration that are characteristic of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo today are the
material representation of different discourses about the politics of memory that circulate
through two competing organizational networks. The Madres regularly enact such
practices at different spatial scales, but these competing practices also come together in
places of symbolic importance for the Madres. Specifically, their competing practices
clash during the Madres' weekly rituals in the Plaza de Mayo and in other plazas where
Madres of different organizational affiliation walk together. As I show below, the
Madres' integration of different spatial scales in a place-based performance act as a
mechanism for further organizational differentiation and competition.

5.4–Conflicts among the Madres de Plaza de Mayo

5.4.1–Conflicting politics of memory

The struggles over the "politics of memory" (i.e., whether and how to find the
"truth" about those who disappeared; how to remember then) clearly divide the two
Madres' organizations today. These conflicts are longstanding and began to publicly unfold when Argentina returned to a constitutional government in 1984. The conflicts are the result of the lack of closure regarding the disappearances of the late 1970s. Even though the government produced a report called Nunca Más ("Never Again") that attempted to clarify what had happened during the military years (the report was the product of a government-sponsored truth commission), to date there has not been any in-depth government investigation regarding the disappearances that goes beyond the scope of the initial Nunca Más report. Moreover, in the late 1990s, a series of "public confessions" by a few former members of the military regarding the methodology of the disappearances received tremendous media attention. This made the issue of "finding out the truth" one of the main topics of discussion in Argentine society at that time. Such confessions re-energized public support for the human rights movement at a time when relatives (such as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo) and friends of those who disappeared knew little about what happened to their loved ones and were still searching for details about episodes that took place over 20 years ago.

As I have already suggested, the question of "finding the truth" has been an issue that divided the Madres since as early as 1979, during the period of formation of the group. Problems surrounding 'truth' also were responsible for the organizational division between the two Madres' organizations have to be situated in the difficult context of contemporary politics of human rights in Argentina that I described in Chapters 3 and 4, where human rights activists work with little hope of achieving justice regarding past human rights violations.

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37 The ongoing conflicts between the two Madres' organizations have to be situated in the difficult context of contemporary politics of human rights in Argentina that I described in Chapters 3 and 4, where human rights activists work with little hope of achieving justice regarding past human rights violations.
in 1986. At the heart of the standing division among the Madres de Plaza de Mayo today are conflicting views and positions regarding whether or not the Madres' activism should include mobilizing to find out details about what really happened to the disappeared (Table 5.1).

As Table 5.1 shows, while Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora supports efforts to find details about the disappearances and has made the search for truth one of its main objectives, the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo opposes any such efforts. In particular, the official position of the Asociación Madres is to oppose the work of forensic anthropologists who have attempted (in many cases successfully) to unearth human remains and identify bodies through the matching of dental records or through the use of DNA technology38.

On the other hand, Madres-Linea Fundadora supports such efforts and has contributed to the work of the forensic anthropologists' teams by providing as much detailed information regarding the disappearances as they have been able to. In some cases, this has brought individual Madres to finally find the remains of their sons and daughters. For example, one of the Madres from this group in Buenos Aires explained that:

"...by 1978 I had already accepted and recognized that my daughter was dead, even though I did not know anything about what had happened to her. I was already a Madre de Plaza de Mayo, so I always stayed active, looking for her. Finally, about a year ago, a team of forensic

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38 A national team of forensic anthropologists, mostly young volunteers who donated their time, was assembled in the early 1980s with the objective of locating and identifying human remains. The teams' methodology has been very successful: the team has advised other Latin American governments and team members have trained other forensic anthropologists throughout the world.
anthropologists identified some human remains as the body of my
daughter. They did it through DNA testing. They were able to tell me
when and how she was killed…it happened just 20 days after she was
kidnapped. Next month, I will also have the remains of my son-in-law,
who was kidnapped together with my daughter and buried in a mass grave
at the same site. Of course this does not mean that I will stop mobilizing as
a Madre de Plaza de Mayo. On the contrary, I now have even more
strength, even though I am old. I have to keep working for all of us "
(personal communication, August 2000)

Whereas for the Linea Fundadora finding the truth about painful events from the
past and recovering the bodies of loved ones has acted as a catalyst for continued
activism, members of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo have found the search for
truth counterproductive and detrimental to the future of their activism. Specifically,
today these activists believe that accepting human remains from the government is
equivalent to accepting that the Madres' struggle has come to an end. Their explanation is
that, since the Madres had originally organized under the motto "Bring them back, alive!"
accepting death today means giving up on years of activism without any punishment for
those responsible for the disappearances. The quote at the beginning of this chapter and
the following testimony of two leaders and active members of the Asociación make this
position clear:

"…what the government wants is that I accept that my son is dead. Then it
is over. Once I have some bones…what am I going to ask for? They say:
'here, have the remains of your son and sign down there'. But once I do
that, it is all over" (personal communication, October, 1999)

"…they [the military] made them [our children] 'disappeared' in the first
place. Therefore we say that that is the way they will continue to be:
"disappeared", not dead. The disappearance of a person is a crime that
does not lapse. Death, on the contrary, does. Once you accept death, it is
all over" (personal communication, September, 1999)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position on:</th>
<th>Madres - Línea Fundadora</th>
<th>Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Truth</strong></td>
<td>• Actively supports and participates in truth finding investigations about the disappeared</td>
<td>• Opposes truth finding investigations about the disappeared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Supports the reconstruction of historical narratives of events surrounding individual disappearances</td>
<td>• Opposes historical investigations of events surrounding individual disappearances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human remains</strong></td>
<td>• Supports unearthing and identifying human remains</td>
<td>• Opposes unearthing and identifying human remains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Welcomes the recovery of human remains</td>
<td>• Opposes receiving human remains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic reparation</strong></td>
<td>• Accepts financial settlements as a matter of personal choice, even though members have</td>
<td>• Rejects financial settlements; Members not allowed to receive financial settlements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>not received any to date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The &quot;disappeared&quot;</strong></td>
<td>• Defines the &quot;disappeared&quot; as individual subjects with their own personal identities</td>
<td>• Defines the &quot;disappeared&quot; as a collective, without reference to individual identities and histories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and histories</td>
<td>• Defines all the &quot;disappeared&quot; as &quot;revolutionaries&quot; or political activists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• States that the &quot;disappeared&quot; were a heterogeneous group of people (some were political activists, others were not)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: Competing views of two Madres’ organizations regarding the legacy of Argentina’s “dirty war”
However, the *Asociaciòn Madres de Plaza de Mayo* itself is riddled with internal conflicts regarding this issue. Even though the official position of the group is refusing to accept human remains, not all *Madres* in the organization agree and many of them hide their own feelings regarding this issue. During an interview with one of the rank and file members of this group, I found out that several *Madres* still would like to recover the bodies of their disappeared sons and daughters and find the truth about the events that led to their disappearances, even though leadership in the organization discourages supports for such efforts. One woman expressed her sadness and concern over never having found the body of her son in the following way:

"...to me this is not over because I could not bury my son. I am not sure where the body was thrown, if he was dumped in the water from a plane, or if he was buried in a mass grave, and that, that I would really like to know" (personal communication with a member of the *Asociaciòn Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, November, 1999).

Therefore, some members of *Asociaciòn* secretly agree with women of the *Línea Fundadora*. *Madres-Línea Fundadora* believes that accepting to unearth human remains is not equivalent to accepting death or to giving up the struggle for justice, but rather that doing so is a way to have actual proof of the crimes committed by the military. Along these lines, in a declaration of principles distributed to the public during one of the weekly marches in the *Plaza de Mayo* in 1999, *Madres-Línea Fundadora* stated that:

"...searching and accepting human remains is a human necessity present in all cultures. It means having the possibility to bring a flower to the burial site of those we love. But the main, fundamental reason [for searching and unearthing human remains] is that it is a necessary instrument to recover historical truth and achieve justice."
The conflicts between the two organizations regarding what to do about human remains have been compounded by two other factors that also come as a consequence of recognizing or failing to acknowledge the death of the Madres' sons and daughters. These factors are, first, financial settlements, and second, whether the 'disappeared' can be represented as individuals with their own identities or whether they should be remembered as a collective (see Table 5.1).

In terms of financial settlements, conflicts among the Madres have emerged as a result of a government-sponsored economic reparation scheme for relatives of those who disappeared during the years of the "dirty war". Specifically, during the first constitutional government after the dictatorship, the government passed a law (Law 24411 or the "law of economic reparation for the disappeared") that specified that those relatives of people who disappeared were entitled to an economic compensation from the government. On this, the government followed the advice of the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights, which encouraged Latin American governments to recognize and accept responsibility for the crimes committed by their militaries in the past.

The official position of Madres-Linea Fundadora regarding this subject is that whether relatives of the disappeared accept or decline the economic compensation provided by the government is a matter of personal choice. According to them, accepting the reparation it is not a sign of abandoning the struggle for justice, but rather an individual right recognized by the state. Still, most of the Madres in this group have not accepted any kind of economic compensation from the government.
On the contrary, the *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* vehemently opposes such economic reparation and openly criticizes those who accept it (including *Madres* from the *Línea Fundadora* group for not speaking against the reparation plan). As one of these *Madres* explained:

"The government will give you money once you have claimed and proved that one of your relatives has disappeared. All human rights organizations accept this, except us, because [we believe] that this is just a way to make you forget. The lives of our sons do not have a price. We will not trade their blood for money. Not at all. And we will not accept a penny from a government who set the military free. Instead, we will fight so that each of those paid assassins ends up in jail. Accepting money for our sons and daughters' disappearances is like killing them all over again" (personal communication, November, 1999)

Another influential leader of the *Asociación Madres* further elaborated on the subject of *Madres* who have accepted the economic reparation:

"There are a lot of people out there who were paid the now infamous economic reparation. They do not understand that once you accept money the struggle is over. Money was invented to buy and sell, and that corrupts our struggle for justice. We will never trade money for life. The capitalist system knows that money divides. We as an organization will never accept the money: the blood of our children is not for sale. If one of our *Madres* accepts the reparation, she immediately stops belonging to our group. It is that simple. Because a mother who accepts money for a child who has been tortured, who has been raped, who has been thrown live onto the sea from a plane, and who then goes to a cemetery and places some flowers on a tombstone... what kind of a mother is that? To be honest with you, it makes me sick. To get cash and then go and throw flowers on the river, what a shame. We do not throw flowers and we do not hug the enemy" (personal communication, September, 1999).

There is another contention between the two *Madres* organizations that further divides them. The ongoing conflicts over whether or not to accept the death of the disappeared and the economic reparations are tied to two broader competing discourses
about who the disappeared were, and how the disappeared should be represented. When
the Madres first mobilized, informally in 1977 and more formally starting in 1979 (see
Chapter 3), what united all women was their collective search for their individual sons
and daughters. However, over time, the Madres expanded their position. They began
presenting themselves to their different audiences not only as mothers looking for their
own missing ones, but rather as a group fighting for truth and justice for all of the 30,000
disappeared. This move changed the Madres' interpretation of motherhood from a
subjective, personal, and individual experience to a collective and shared one. Mothers
united by individual grievances started to talk about themselves as mothers of all of the
disappeared:

"...we socialized motherhood and we became mothers of all of them [the
disappeared]. Today we fight on behalf of everybody, for those who have
mothers, for those who do not have a mother because she has died, or for
those whose mothers never cared or never became activists. We fight
equally for all the disappeared" (personal communication with a member
of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, November, 1999)

This was the position shared by all the Madres in 1986, when the group divided
for the first time. But this general understanding of "socialized motherhood" masked
internal conflicts among the Madres. While all Madres agreed that their goal was broader
and not limited to the search for individual sons and daughters, there were disagreements
about how exactly one could reconcile individual feelings of loss with the broader goals
of the group. By the time of the division the two organizations had already adopted a
different stance (Table 5.1).
The women who left the original organization and formed the Linea Fundadora group believed that it was possible to seek justice for all of the disappeared without giving up their own personal connection and relationship with their disappeared sons or daughters. On the other hand, leaders of the Madres grouped in the original Asociación attempted a much bolder and risky move. Specifically, the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo effectively socialized motherhood and stopped referring to their missing sons and daughters by their individual names. The Madres of this group were forced to stop carrying pictures of their missing ones or to invoke their names during public activities such as the weekly marches in the plazas. One of their leaders explained that:

"...this was a very hard thing to do, very hard. Many of the Madres who claimed that they were fighting for the 30,000 disappeared still went to the Plaza de Mayo carrying pictures of their sons. It is not easy, it is the hardest thing to do. Already in 1985 we attempted to do this, and this obviously created a lot of tension within the group" (personal communication with a member of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, September 1999)

Even today, there are Madres in the Asociación who have not completely achieved this "transformation", as one of the women told me. For example, some Madres still carry pictures of their missing sons and daughters in their purses or in their coat pockets, but they do not show them in public. However, many of these women voluntarily showed me these pictures and explained to me that they could never stop thinking about their sons or daughters as individuals and that they did so only during public activities and for strategic reasons, as a sign of loyalty to their organization.

Over time, the official position of the Madres in the Asociación has grown even more radical. Today, not only do the Madres from the Asociación claim to be the mothers...
of 30,000 disappeared without individual names or faces, but they have also begun to talk of the disappeared as "revolutionaries". The Asociación also criticizes some Madres from the Linea Fundadora group who do not want to refer to their sons or daughters in such terms:

"What has happened to the Madres from Linea Fundadora is sad. They never understood the lives that their own sons and daughters were living [when they disappeared]. The disappeared were revolutionaries. These women had given birth to beautiful revolutionary children. So many Madres used to say that they did not understand why the military kidnapped their sons. Let me tell you: the military did not take them because they were stupid. The military took them because these kids wanted the country to be different; they had a vision for a different country. And this is why one has to be a mother who honors the kind of child that one brought to this world" (personal communication with a member of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, November 1999)

This change in discourse (from 'disappeared' to 'revolutionaries') has coincided with a broadening of the goals of the Asociación. Today, leaders of this group no longer classify the organization merely as a human rights group. Instead, they claim that they are a group of activists working for social change more generally, which includes but is not limited to, human rights. On the other hand, Madres-Linea Fundadora still positions itself as a human rights organization and believes it is part of a larger human rights movement in Argentina and Latin America. Even though today they conceptualize human rights broadly (e.g., they also believe that the right to work is a universal human right), their main explicit goals are still focused on finding truth and justice regarding the disappearances of the 1970s.

To summarize, the two Madres' organizations' positions regarding how to represent and remember the disappeared today are in sharp opposition to each other.
Whereas Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo claims life for the ‘disappeared’ and attempts to represent them collectively as a homogenous group of revolutionaries, Madres-Linea Fundadora and members of independent groups of Madres across Argentina recognize that each of the disappeared has his/her own identity and history that the Madres would like to reclaim in their honor. As I show below, these conflicting discourses regarding competing politics of representation today are enacted and represented materially at different spatial scales, creating competing and conflicting landscapes of memory.

5.4.2-Conflicting landscapes of memory

Many of the current conflicts between the two Madres’ organizations existed from early on, even before the organizational division in 1986. At that time, conflicts were particularly high between the more active Madres and those who saw themselves as potential leaders of the emerging organization. The current president of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, for example, was not among the first women who met in the Plaza de Mayo in 1977. However, by 1979, this energetic woman had achieved wide support among the Madres. Other Madres, including many of the founding members who did not agree with her leadership style, however, resented many of her ideas. But most women chose to suppress tensions for the sake of the survival of the group. At a time when the military was very strong and the Madres were alone in their struggle, women saw no room for internal dissent and instead chose to concentrate on the broader goals that had brought them together in the first place. One of the Madres from the Linea Fundadora group recalls:

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"We were very prudent. We never said anything publicly that would affect or compromise the larger goal of our movement...we were discrete and we attempted to keep a balance so that we would not distort the image of the Madres and so that we would not damage the image of the 'disappeared'" (personal communication, November, 1999)

But the return of a constitutional government to Argentina in 1983 changed this arrangement. In the process of rebuilding civil society after the military dictatorship, relatives and friends of those who disappeared organized in different groups and began to ask for a serious government investigation about the crimes. Many family members wanted to search for the sites of mass burials, unearth human remains, and identify bodies of disappeared people. Graffiti and paintings representing the disappeared began to appear in many public places across the country. Friends and colleagues of the disappeared wanted to pay tribute to the victims. Some wanted plaques and monuments with the names of the disappeared names on them. Others also wanted to name streets in their honor. These practices constituted a "spatialization" of the politics of memory, and they energized a growing human rights movement in Argentina.

The unfolding of the politics of memory benefited the Madres at first. The Madres' public gatherings, for example, were no longer under threat by the military, and the performative power of the Madres' activism flourished, making the Madres' activities famous around the world (see Chapter 6). But the Madres de Plaza de Mayo also found themselves trapped in the middle of this emerging geo-politics of memory. Human rights activism now also included the spatial representation of memory and commemoration as a particular strategy for movement visibility, but as I have shown in the previous section,
the Madres as a collective did not agree on whether such strategies would actually benefit or damage their organization's long-term goals. Different Madres began espousing different positions, and women found it hard to reconcile their disagreements regarding these issues. One of the fourteen original members of the Madres recalls that:

"In 1979, we had elected a president for Madres in informal elections...immediately after that, she began to act in a very authoritarian fashion. She became a fundamentalist. For example, she decided that unearthing human remains was not a good idea. She did not want to allow people to put plaques or markers commemorating any of the disappeared. All of a sudden her opinions were the only valid ones, demonstrating her authoritarian character. And after hard years of fighting together, the movement started to deteriorate" (personal communication, October 1999)

In the end, these differences (together with conflicts over leadership and power distribution) proved irreconcilable and the Madres ultimately divided into the two existing organizations. Today, 15 years after that original division, Madres of different organizational affiliation continue clashing over the representation of memory and of the disappeared in the landscape (Table 5.2).

As I have already argued, Madres-Linea Fundadora believes that remembering and honoring the lives of those who disappeared in the past is a strategy to keep the human rights movement alive. As a result, Madres in this group emphasize making visible the disturbing events of the recent past to promote transmission of memory to other generations as well as to remember and honor those who disappeared. Their strategies for continued activism depend on the material manifestation of memory in the landscape and are enacted through the construction of temporary and permanent physical markers of memory in the urban landscape. A case in point are the temporary exhibitions...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position on:</th>
<th>Madres - Línea Fundadora</th>
<th>Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temporary displays of commemoration</td>
<td>• Regularly sets up temporary memorials in public places, often displaying pictures and names of the disappeared</td>
<td>• Condemns the erection of memorials and rejects using pictures and names of the disappeared during public events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent memorial landscapes</td>
<td>• Supports naming streets in honor of the disappeared</td>
<td>• Opposes naming streets after the disappeared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Actively supports the conservation of buildings and sites that housed concentration camps and illegal detention centers as “places of memory”</td>
<td>• Opposes the conservation of buildings or sites associated with the disappeared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Supports the establishment of “museums of memory” to commemorate the disappeared</td>
<td>• Opposes the establishment of museums to remember or commemorate the disappearances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Supports the construction of a national monument to the victims of state terrorism</td>
<td>• Does not support the construction of a national monument to the victims of state terrorism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: The position of the two Madres' organizations regarding memorial landscapes.
of pictures of the disappeared that the Madres set up in parks and other public places during weekends, when families with children flood parks (Figure 5.2). The pictures are usually accompanied with a narrative written by the Madres themselves in which the life history of each disappeared individual was narrated. The Madres often stand by the pictures, willing to tell those passing by the history of their struggle and the life history of their missing loved ones. It is a strategy to place the disappeared in the landscape, to create landscapes of memory that reminded every one that the disappeared were regular people like anybody else, with their own families, occupations, problems, projects and dreams.

Figure 5.2: Madres from the Linea Fundadora group gather around a temporary memorial displaying pictures of the disappeared. Madres-Linea Fundadora set up this memorial during their annual “March of Resistance” in the Plaza de Mayo in December of 1999.
Madres-Linea Fundadora also attempts to create more permanent memorial landscapes at different spatial scales. In recent years, some members have supported projects that included naming streets with names of individuals disappeared. Many such projects have become reality. One of the Madres proudly explained that:

"...there is a street in the city of Pilar, where my daughter's body was found, a street named after her. There is also a plaque that explains who my daughter was and how she died. We also planted a tree there, to continue life next to my daughter's name" (personal communication, September, 2000)

Other Madres from this group are also involved in efforts to save buildings that used to function as concentration camps during the years of the dictatorship (Figure 5.3). For example, in 1999 and together with other human rights groups, Madres-Linea Fundadora successfully lobbied the Buenos Aires Legislature so that a former Navy School that had functioned as a concentration camp would not be demolished, and instead, would become a museum to honor those who were tortured and died in the building (Figure 5.4).

According to Madres-Linea Fundadora, their goal is to bring life to a landscape that most people in Argentina associated with physical torture and death. After the legislature approved the project, one of the Madres declared that:

"...this building must be a place where life is dignified. It must be a memorial to the past but also a place that contributes to teach people about important values such as the respect for human life regardless of our differences"
Figure 5.3: *Mansión Sere* (the Sere House) in Morón, Buenos Aires. The house functioned as a concentration camp and was demolished in the early 1980’s. Today the site houses a community center and museum. A team of archeologists is currently excavating the site in search of human remains and artifacts from the late 1970s.

Figure 5.4: The *Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada* (the Navy’s School of Mechanics) in Buenos Aires functioned as one of the largest concentration camps during the late 1970s. It is now scheduled to open as a museum to commemorate those who died there and to educate future generations about Argentina’s dirty war.
Finally, *Madres-Linea Fundadora* is part of a coalition of ten human rights organizations that supports the construction of a national monument to the victims of state terrorism (a project still under way today). The idea is to construct a large memorial on the banks of the Rio de la Plata in Buenos Aires, since many of those who 'disappeared' were thrown into the river and left there to drown (these details became available after the series of public military confessions that took place in the 1990s). The names of the disappeared will also appear on the monument, symbolizing all of the people who suffered the effects of state terrorism. The monument will even have open, empty spaces, so that when more bodies were recovered or the truth about others who were gone surfaced, their names could be incorporated in the monument.

These strategies for the creation of memorial landscapes at different scales, however, are in complete opposition to those strategies of the *Asociación Madres* (see Table 5.2). In the first place, and consistent with the *Asociación*’s stance about the disappeared, these *Madres* reject strategies for memory and commemoration that include representations of the disappeared as dead or as individuals. For example, they oppose setting up temporary memorials with pictures of the disappeared. Additionally, the *Asociación Madres* opposes the construction of a national monument to victims of state terrorism. In a letter to the Commission for the Monument to the Disappeared (the umbrella group who supports the construction of a national memorial), the *Asociación Madres* stated that:
"We, the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, will use all our means to prevent the names of our sons appearing on the planned monument to be erected by the banks of the river by the same people who pardoned those who murdered our sons. If it is necessary, we will use chisels and hammers to erase the names inscribed in such a monument which in our opinion offends the memory of our dear revolutionary sons...we want to clarify that erasing the names of our sons from the monument is not an act of violence. Violence and arrogance are used by those who, without our approval and authorization, decide to place the names of our sons on the monument."

Finally, their emphasis on life and on the continuity of activism also has led the Asociación Madres to oppose the conservation of concentration camps and the construction of museums. These Madres claim that there is no room for 'museums of death' within their politics for broader social change. Even though the main offices of the Asociación in Buenos Aires are full of memorabilia from the years of the Madres' activism and, even though the walls in their offices in the city of La Plata are adorned with portraits of their disappeared sons and daughters (Figure 5.5), the Madres maintain that they do not want their homes (their offices) to become museums. Speaking of the Buenos Aires offices, known as Casa de las Madres, the vice-president of the Asociación explained that:

"This house is full of life. We do not want it to become a museum. We want this house to continue bursting with life when we are gone. We do not want anything stationary, we do not want museums. Everything has to be constantly moving" (personal communication, September, 1999).
Figure 5.5: Some memories are difficult to abandon. In an open contradiction with the official position of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, a member of this group proudly poses in front of a collage of portraits of men and women who disappeared during Argentina's dirty war. There is also organizational memorabilia on display (bottom of picture) that creates a "museum" or memorial effect in the offices of the Asociación in the city of La Plata. However, leaders of this organization would like to avoid this kind of representation of the disappeared, especially in public activities.
These strategies for (non) commemoration have been mostly designed by the leaders of the Asociación (in particular by the president, the vice-president, and a handful of very active and influential Madres based in Buenos Aires) but they are supposed to be adopted by all members of the Asociación Madres around the country. Moreover, most of the strategies have also been designed to publicly condemn the positions adopted by Madres-Linea Fundadora. Even though the strategies of the Asociación still use the language of human rights and memory, their aim is to publicly mark the differences with the other group of Madres and to communicate the goals and positions of the Asociación in a new institutional context.

As a result of their position, the Asociación Madres is not only at odds with Madres-Linea Fundadora but also with all other human rights organizations who support the creation of landscapes of memory at different spatial scales. In sum, the opposing positions regarding the material representation of memory and commemoration between the two Madres organizations are an intrinsic part of the activism of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo today. These conflicting positions and strategies for memory clash when the Madres come together in the plazas and produce a complex landscape where human rights politics, the politics of memory, and the struggle for organizational recognition and survival collide.

5.5-The Plaza as a site for competing performances and conflict resolution

From the beginning of their activities as a group, the Madres activism has been characterized by the presence of performative elements, ranging from the weekly gatherings in plazas to their disruption of public official activities (such as military
parades) in which the *Madres* attracted the attention of spectators and attempted to "steal the show". And as I have shown in the previous chapter, the *Madres'* weekly gatherings in the *Plaza de Mayo* in Buenos Aires certainly follow the structure of a public performance.

However, such performances are scripted practices or twice-behaved behaviors (Schechner, 1991) that are not limited to the walks in the plazas. Rather, they begin much earlier as the *Madres* arrive to the plazas and begin preparing themselves and setting the stage for the weekly walk. They also end after the actual silent walks have taken place, as the *Madres* reflect over the success or effectiveness of their weekly demonstration both in the *Plaza* or in their way back to their offices, to a café, or to their homes. Moreover, during their weekly gatherings in the *Plaza de Mayo*, the *Madres* carry, express, and perform multiple identities simultaneously. First, they are mothers; second, they are mothers of sons and daughters who have disappeared; third, they are *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*; and fourth, they are *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* of different organizational affiliation. In effect, the *Madres* are activists who perform identities that are liminal or always in between (Schechner, 1991). Therefore, it is by considering relations between the *Madres'* multiple identities and audiences (which include the *Madres* themselves) in the context of the totality of their "performance sequence" (Schechner, 1985) that we can better understand how the *Madres'* competing politics of memory come together in the plazas.

Because the *Madres'* activism can be described as a kind of performative politics, it should not come as a surprise that the current differences and conflicts between the two *Madres'* organizations are also represented and negotiated in a performative manner. As
Turner explains, communities based on one principle (such as the Madres, who are united by their shared grievances as mothers of the disappeared) are often endangered by suppressed conflicts engendered by organization on other principles (Turner, 1992, 23). Thus the Madres' performances not only help them feel united at a basic level of activism throughout the country; the performances also enable conflicts among the Madres to be played out in terms of customarily acceptable disagreements (see Parkin, 1994).

The dramatization of the Madres' competing politics of memory begins as soon as they arrive in the Plaza for their weekly gatherings. From the beginning of their days as activists, the Madres wore white headscarves covering their heads as a way to identify each other (see chapter 3). The practice continues today. On their way to the Plaza de Mayo, either walking or on public transportation, the Madres look like any other woman in the streets. But as soon as the Madres approach the Plaza, they immediately put on the white headscarves and become visibly identified as Madres de Plaza de Mayo. The transformation is immediate, and so are the reactions of people around them, who either walk away from the women or approach them to congratulate them or offer encouraging words of support for their activism. However, the different organizational positions regarding the representation of the disappeared have altered this practice.

Women from Madres-Linea Fundadora have embroidered the names of their disappeared children (and with the dates on which the disappearances took place) in their headscarves (Figure 5.6). This is consistent with their position of remembering the disappeared as individuals with their own histories and identities.
Figure 5.6: The headscarves of *Madres de Plaza Mayo–Linea Fundadora*. Most women in this group have embroidered the names of their disappeared son or daughter as well as the date of the disappearance on their headscarves.
Moreover, for Madres-Linea Fundadora, the plazas are places where the disappeared become visible to the Madres and to the Madres' multiple audiences. Therefore, every week, the Madres grouped in the Linea Fundadora group carry pictures of their missing sons and daughters in the plazas (Figure 5.7 and Figure 5.8). The Madres walk together displaying banners with a collage of pictures of their children, or carrying portraits of their sons and daughters pinned to their clothing.

Figure 5.7: Madres-Linea Fundadora in the Plaza de Mayo, carrying a banner with pictures and of their missing sons and daughters during their weekly gathering.
On the other hand, the Asociación Madres does not carry any visible pictures of the disappeared at all. Additionally, Madres from the Asociación wear white headscarves without the names of the disappeared, and white headscarf with no inscriptions at all has been adopted as the official symbol that represents the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Figure 5.9). One of the Madres of the Asociación explained to me that:

"We took the names of our children and the dates of the disappearances off of our headscarves once we decided to socialize motherhood. In their place, we added the legend Aparición con vida [Bring the disappeared back, alive] which is our motto" (personal communication, September, 1999).
However, the Asociación Madres still has found a way to come to the plazas to claim for the disappeared as a group (without having to carry individual pictures and without calling them by their individual names) and to represent them as being alive. Today, the Asociación Madres represents the disappeared through a particular depiction and use of their own bodies. Specifically, the Asociación Madres maintains that the disappearances have made them perpetually pregnant. In effect, the Madres claim that their revolutionary sons and daughters still live inside their bodies, in their wombs, and that from that location they give the Madres energy to keep their activism alive.

Moreover, the Madres from the Asociación also see themselves as embodying the activism that their “revolutionary” sons and daughters had started. During a speech in the
Plaza de Mayo in the winter of 2000, the president of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo addressed a small crowd of activists and faced the Argentine presidential offices across the street using the following words:

"Government officials: We want to tell you all that you are the only dead ones, because our children are alive. Yes, they live inside each unemployed person, inside each starving child in this country...but above all....they live inside our bodies"

Consistent with such claims (the disappeared live inside their bodies), the Madres from the Asociación represent their bodies differently. In both public and private places (such as inside their offices and in squares, parks, and streets), the Asociación Madres has commissioned the creation of murals and other forms of public art by artists who can best capture the use of their own body as a particular site of resistance (Figure 5.10).

According to one of the Madres in this group, these murals and paintings represent:

“...a typical Madre de Plaza de Mayo, a woman who is getting old, has large and thick legs, is perpetually pregnant, and has a lot of strength and energy because she carries a revolutionary son inside” (personal communication, November, 1999)

The contrasts and differences between the two groups become very clear during the Madres performances in the plazas. When the Madres from the Línea Fundadora group come to the plazas for the weekly performances, they carry pictures of the disappeared to make the disappeared visible, because for these Madres the “disappearances” mean the displacement of a person from his/her regular social and spatial location to become a “nobody” located “nowhere” (hence the noun “disappeared”). Thus, they want to make the disappeared visible again.
Figure 5.10: Perpetually pregnant Madre de Plaza de Mayo. This mural is painted on a wall inside the offices of the La Plata chapter of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo. The Asociación Madres commissioned the mural from a group of high school students who participated in a competition to paint the mural. One of the Madres described the center figure in the mural as a typical Madre de Plaza de Mayo: a woman who is "...is getting old, has large and thick legs, is always pregnant, and has a lot of strength and energy because she carries a revolutionary son inside" (personal communication, November, 1999). Note the blank white headscarf on the woman’s head (without any names) and other symbolic elements around the main figure, such as baby diapers (top right) and the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo newspaper (top left).
Consistent with their politics of memory, Madres-Linea Fundadora still makes the boundaries between “mothers” and “the disappeared” clear in their public activities. On the other hand, Madres from the Asociación come to the plazas relying on a specific discourse and representation of their bodies to make their politics visible. Moreover, they have internalized the disappearances within their own bodies: both the Madres and the 'disappeared' are together in one body, and such bodies had the strength to fight for social change.39

Interestingly, and despite of the differences between the two groups, the body has become the spatial scale through which both groups of Madres inscribe and represent their competing politics in the plazas. It is through strategic uses and representations of their “bodies as places” (Nast and Pile, 1998) that the Madres competing politics become visible in the squares. By pinning pictures of their children to their bodies, Madres from the Línea Fundadora group conceptualize their bodies as sites for commemoration of the past and as places where one can read about the past. On the other hand and in a more explicit way, by refusing to carry pictures or display the names of the disappeared and by re-imagining their own bodies as “perpetually pregnant”, women in the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo understand their bodies as platforms for the launching and organization of future activism.

39 According to the Asociación Madres, the embodiment of the disappeared in their bodies helps explain how the Madres de Plaza de Mayo have been able to sustain activism for so many years. The Madres explained that it was their 'revolutionary' sons and daughters who made them realize that it was possible to think of a better and more just society. According to the Asociación, this was the lesson that the Madres learned when the disappearances took place. In a way, the Asociación Madres today also depicts the disappearances as a learning, life-changing experience that has had positive consequences despite their horrific nature.

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The simultaneous presence of Madres from both organizations in the plazas (at the same day and time) projects in the landscape different positions regarding both human rights politics and the politics of memory. The Madres inscribe their performances with their competing discourses and make such conflicting narratives visible in the plaza. When the actual silent walks in the plazas begin, the competing performances develop to their full extent. During my fieldwork, many of the spectators watching the Madres walk around the monument in the middle of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires were completely unaware of the tensions and conflicts that were unfolding in front of them. When I first met the Madres, I also could not capture these conflicts.

But once I changed my perspective and walked with the different groups of Madres, I entered a new, different performance. What from the “outside” seemed like a non-violent demonstration of women activists soon began looking more like a careful scripted competition to mark the Plaza with specific discourses regarding the politics of memory.

First, leaders of the Asociación often ordered all Madres in their group to walk together holding hands side by side, creating an impressive line up of women that was supposed to show the strength of their organization. When the Madres walked this way, they look like an army of foot soldiers ready to battle, united and impenetrable by the enemy. Their president and leader always walked in the middle and carefully controlled the pace of the walk. On the other hand, Madres of the Linea Fundadora group walked in small groups, or sometimes by themselves, carrying pictures and signs and looking more reflective and self-absorbed. When they talked among themselves, many of the conversations centered over controlling the pace and speed of their walk. They were
always very careful to keep enough distance from the Madres of the Asociación, so that those who knew about their differences would not confuse members of one group with members of the other. Still, Madres of all organizational affiliations were always careful that the whole performance looked unified and that the Madres look united to those watching them from the outside (this is consistent with the more strategic functions of the weekly gatherings that I described in chapter 4). All Madres always attempted to form a whole, complete round of women walking around the monument without leaving empty spaces, making sure that it was clear that during their performances the center of the Plaza de Mayo was a space under full control of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. The Madres are still concerned with the negative perceptions that their multiple audiences might experience as a result of the division.

Second, as I have already indicated, the Madres use their own bodies as sites of commemoration or as platforms for future strategies of resistance by inscribing them with representations consistent with their different organizational positions regarding the politics of memory. But during the performances the Madres from the Asociación also use specific narratives about the bodies of Madres of other organizational affiliation as a strategy for inscribing competing stances about human rights activism in the landscape. Specifically, since 1999, Madres from the Asociación have carried a large banner during their walks in the Plaza de Mayo that reads: “Those who accept the economic reparation are prostituting themselves” (Figure 5.11). This is the most controversial and explicit confrontation between competing Madres’ organizations that has taken place during the weekly performances in the Plaza de Mayo since the Madres first met in 1977.
Figure 5.11: “El que cobra la reparación económica se prostituye” ("Those who accept economic reparation prostitute themselves"). The women from the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo carry a sign that equates accepting the economic reparation offered by the government with prostitution. The sign was designed as an open attack on Madres of a different organizational affiliation and is an attempt to make visible in one place (the Plaza de Mayo) a conflict that takes place at a different scale and that often is not represented in public.
The legend in the banner was purposely chosen by leaders of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo as an attempt to portray the bodies of Madres of other organizational affiliations as "containers" or "receptacles" that are no longer worthy of continuing with the struggle for human rights in Argentina. The statement in the sign draws from a popular machista Latin American narrative that attempts to diminish the position of women in society by associating women's bodies with prostitution. Leaders of the Asociación chose to associate the bodies of Madres from other affiliations with prostitution to attack the economic reparation scheme established by the government and to condemn those who accept it.40

To make their statement even more hard-hitting, Madres from the Asociación talk about their perpetually pregnant bodies in public speeches after their performance on the Plaza, contrasting their own revolutionary, socialized motherhood with the "lower" quality of activism of other Madres de Plaza de Mayo whose bodies they describe as empty and they associate with prostitution.

In trying to establish this difference, even the appropriateness of the presence in the Plaza of independent Madres de Plaza de Mayo or of those of Línea Fundadora has begun to be questioned by leaders of the Asociación Madres. For example, during several weekly gatherings, leaders of the Asociación casually commented among themselves that all the other Madres were now "out of place" (Creswell, 1996) in the Plaza. Moreover, some of these Madres have also began questioning whether women of different

40 Madres from the Línea Fundadora have not accepted the economic reparation themselves, but they have not condemned the scheme either and instead claim that its acceptance is a matter of personal choice and an individual right.
organizational affiliation can actually perform the role of a Madre de Plaza de Mayo.

Talking about a particular woman who had not attended the weekly performances for several months and who identifies herself as an “independent” Madre de Plaza de Mayo, a member of the Asociación said that:

“All I can do is respect her as a mother of the disappeared, but she is definitely not a Madre de Plaza de Mayo. I hope that by now everybody here understands the difference.” (personal communication, August 2000).

Bringing the controversial banner to the Plaza was a strategic decision taken by the leadership of the Asociación with the goal of making visible during the weekly performances one of the conflicts that most deeply divides the Madres as a group today. However, many members of the Asociación have found the approach too extremist and regret that their leaders adopted such a stance, in particular because it openly attacks other Madres whom they consider their friends and partners in activism. Several members would prefer that the weekly gatherings in the Plaza continue to be about uniting Madres from different places and fear that bringing these competing politics of memory to the Plaza will undermine the sustainability of the Madres’ activism. When asked her impressions about the sign and the decision of the leaders to carry it during the weekly marches, one of the Madres explained that:

“I do not agree with many things that our president has been doing, but I also recognize that if it wasn’t for her, maybe our activism would have waned. But I still think that we could state our position in a different manner. Insults really bother me.” (Personal communication, November 1999)

At first, other Madres de Plaza de Mayo (both Fundadoras and independents) witnessed this open confrontation in disbelief. Many were deeply offended and lamented
that differences that they had tried to keep away from the public eye for many years had made their way to the plazas on Thursdays. Until this situation developed, these activists believed that Madres across Argentina could still be united by the power of their common experiences as mothers of the disappeared and by their weekly performances in the plazas. Today, they still believe this is possible if only there were to be a change in the leadership style of Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Many of these Madres describe the leadership of the Asociación as a dictatorship that, by denigrating other mothers, ends up damaging the credibility of the movement as a whole.

As a reaction to the spatialization of the conflict around the issue of economic reparation, Madres-Linea Fundadora also began bringing a banner to the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires. Rather than carrying the banner during their walks, these Madres wrap the banner around the fence that protects the pyramid in the center of the Plaza de Mayo. Their banner does not attack other Madres or any particular group, but is rather an attempt to explain and justify the position of the Línea Fundadora group and of other human rights activists and relatives of the disappeared relative to the subject of economic reparations. Their banner reads: “The economic reparations imply the recognition of state-sponsored terrorism. Jail to the genocides!” (Figure 5.12).

Finally, in an attempt to further differentiate themselves from other activists, in recent years Madres from the Asociación have added a new component to their weekly gatherings. After the thirty minute walk are over, these Madres move to a different section of the plaza and give a public speech in which they often condemn the state’s lack of attention to their claims, or consistent with the broadened discourse of their group, criticize the current wave of neo-liberal reform that has become prevalent in Argentina.
Figure 5.12: The conflicts over the issue of economic reparations for the disappeared becomes visible in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires every Thursday during the Madres weekly silent marches. Madres de Plaza de Mayo - Línea Fundadora decided to make their position on this issue part of the plaza's landscape after they were openly criticized by the Asociación Madres. Their banner reads: “The economic reparations imply the recognition of state-sponsored terrorism. Jail to the genocides.”
This new act within their performance has broken with the long-standing tradition of the silent walks that had made the Madres activism famous and novel in the first place. On the other hand, Madres-Linea Fundadora continues with the tradition as it has always been, by walking in silence and only remaining in the center of the square. However, because many of these women today also interpret human rights more broadly, they also carry signs with statements that criticize the current government and that associate neo-liberal reform with the old and “new” disappeared in society: the poor, the unemployed, and the marginalized.

Overall, the Madres have added different elements to their performances in the plazas in an attempt to make visible in the landscape the organizational divisions that have existed for many years. However, those spectators watching the Madres perform have not noted much change in the weekly marches and are not aware of the subtle additions described above. For example, several people who walk by the Plaza de Mayo on a weekly basis and stop to watch during the Madres’ performances told me that they were unaware that more than one organization of Madres de Plaza de Mayo walked in the square every Thursday (moreover, many people did not even know that the Madres had divided). Most people already know what to expect and know what the walks are all about and do not pay attention to small additions and details that have become part of the performances. Most spectators see only one identity being performed: that of mothers of the disappeared or Madres de Plaza de Mayo in general.

Relying on the repetition of and accumulation of certain movements, (e.g., the slow paced walk around monuments), the Madres deploy a “low intensity” performance (Shechner, 1985) as a strategy to maintain a sense of unity among all women and to
suppress the visibility of their conflicts as much as possible. The Madres' attempt to mask their division during their collective performances is also reflection of what Turner (1992, 23) calls acts of "situational suppression" that are characteristic of all ritual activities. Specifically, even though the Madres find themselves divided by organizational affiliation, they believe that openly admitting such divisions endangers the effectiveness of a collective practice that is supposed to demonstrate the unity and strength of a community of activist mothers united by the shared pain that the disappearances of their sons and daughters has generated.

But as I have shown, within the performance, the Madres do render visible their conflicting views regarding human rights to a different audience. By drawing on spatial manifestations of competing politics of memory at different scales and condensing them within the totality of the performance sequence in the plazas, the Madres also perform for themselves, expressing more than one identity at the same time. In effect, the Madres are their own (internally differentiated) audiences.

As I have shown above, leaders of the Asociación have consciously added elements to the weekly marches and suppressed traditional ones as a way to differentiate themselves from the Linea Fundadora and from independent Madres. For leaders of the Asociación, the performances are a strategy to remind the women who left this organization of the principles that guide the group today. The performances also act as mechanism of disciplinary control of the Asociación's own membership: women are instructed to act in certain ways in the plazas, and this functions as a constant reminder of their organizational affiliation and allegiance. Madres-Linea Fundadora also uses the performances in this way. During the performances, this group of Madres talk to each
other and remind themselves of the reasons why they decided to separate from the
Asociación in the first place. Overall, the performances bring to the surface leadership
conflicts that emerged years ago but that are still in place. For example, while rank-and-
file members of different organizational affiliation greet each other and talk in the plaza
before the silent walks begin, leaders of the opposing organizations never do and,
 furthermore, try to avoid running into each other during the performances.

The Madres' gathering in the plazas have thus become performances within
performances (directed to multiple audiences and with multiple objectives). Interestingly,
the Madres have achieved such double performances by scaling their rituals in the plazas.
Specifically, for many of those who watch the Madres perform, the plazas are the "center
stage" in which the Madres' struggle has been placed or situated over the years. In other
words, many people see the plazas as the "spaces for representation" (Mitchell, 1996) of
the Madres' claims. In this sense, plazas constitute a landscape of memory that operates
at a single spatial scale. However, for the Madres (who constitute a different audience),
the plazas are also strategic locations in which to place in the landscape competing
politics that are embodied and played out at different spatial scales (e.g., as I have shown
before, through their own bodies, temporary memorials, monuments, etc.). Different
spatial scales therefore are condensed in one place and act as the arenas where power
relations are played out and negotiated (see Swyngedow, 1997).

Some Madres (in particular leaders) are willing to bring these competing politics
to the surface because the plazas are the "natural" or historic setting of the Madres'
activism and they believe that the totality of the performance sequence will hide or mask
from some of their external audiences (e.g., the government, the media) the conflicting
politics of memory that they want only some audiences to capture (e.g., other Madres, other human rights groups). This strategy of both situational expression and suppression (Turner, 1992), however, has also begun to be considered a strategy of oppression by several of the Madres who disagree with bringing inter-organizational conflicts to the plaza. As I have shown above, many Madres feel uncomfortable openly attacking other Madres. Therefore, scaled performances have introduced an element of tension within the groups, especially inside the ranks of the Asociación Madres. This not only endangers organizational cohesion within the Asociación but also threatens the established image of the Madres' activism across Argentina and the world.

5.6-Discussion: Geography and the scales of commemoration

My goal in this chapter has been to clarify how different spatialities are embedded in the construction and maintenance of collective memory and memorial landscapes. Specifically, I have analyzed the geographic dimensions of the different discourses and practices that give rise to the Madres de Plaza de Mayo's current competing "geo-politics of memory". In doing so, I have paid particular attention to the discourses and practices that are embodied in the Madres' weekly collective rituals in public squares across Argentina.

As I have shown, the spatialization of the politics of memory in the 1980s exacerbated internal conflicts with the widespread network of Madres de Plaza de Mayo across Argentina and was an important catalyst for the organizational division of a network of activist mothers of the disappeared across Argentina. Since then, the manifestation of competing politics of memory at different spatial scales has evolved.
Today, Madres who still feel united at a more personal level of activism are separated by different discourses and positions regarding human rights and by different organizational allegiances. These differences, in turn, have been deepened by the spatialization of conflicting understandings of historical memory.

On the one hand, Madres from the Linea Fundadora group and independent Madres pursue strategies that center on remembering and honoring the lives of those who disappeared in the past. These strategies are dependent on the material manifestation of memory in the landscape and are enacted through the construction of temporary and permanent physical markers at different spatial scales.

On the other hand, Madres grouped in the Asociacion pursue strategies for future activism that are based on a re-interpretation of the past and a re-configuration of the identities of the disappeared and of their own identities as mothers. Their strategies are also enacted at different spatial scales, but a main difference relative to the other groups of Madres is that members of the Asociacion do not work on the construction of landscapes of memory per se. Instead, the Madres utilize the vocabulary of the politics of memory with different goals. Specifically, Madres in the Asociacion attempt to use their own bodies to enact more mobile and broader politics of social change within a discourse of human rights. Yet, these strategies have not been the result of a consensus of opinions of all Madres in this group, but rather the outcome of strategic decisions by leaders who attempted to differentiate this organization from others in the Argentine human rights movement. As a result, this creates conflicts and tensions within the organization that sometimes push individual members closer to the position and politics of the other Madres and threatens organizational cohesion.
In recent years, conflicting organizational discourses between the two Madres' organizations have found a place for visible expression during the Madres' weekly performances in plazas across Argentina. In the same way that the sustainability of a network of activist mothers has been enhanced by the use of place-oriented performative strategies (see chapter 4), performative strategies in places of symbolic importance for the Madres today also serve to mark boundaries and current differences between the two groups. Specifically, the Madres bring to the plazas their different and conflicting views about the truth, about the "disappeared" and about historical memory. Over the years such conflicting politics of memory have become spatialized in different ways to the point that today it is almost impossible to separate discourses from their material manifestation in the landscape.

Today, both groups of Madres “place” their distinct views regarding memory and commemoration with their own bodies every time they occupy a public square to conduct one of their now traditional weekly silent marches. The presence of the two groups of Madres in the squares (with their own appearance, their own ways of dressing, and their own ways of representing the disappeared and themselves) projects in the landscape conflicting positions about the role that memory and commemoration play in the struggle for human rights in Argentina today. Disagreements over the best way to keep the human rights movement alive together with competing politics of identity and representation—regarding both the disappeared and the Madres themselves—that are regularly enacted at different spatial scales converge and are condensed in the Madres' weekly collective rituals in squares across Argentina. Thus, even though the Madres have walked together in the plazas for almost 25 years to stimulate public attention to the problem of the
disappeared and of human rights violations, the Madres’ activism no longer represents a single and unified landscape of memory and resistance as it originally happened in the late 1970s.

Rather, the Madres’ performances today give place to a juxtaposition of competing landscapes of memory in a single place. In turn, this exacerbates inter-organizational conflicts between different groups of Madres. For example, in the past three years, the Asociación Madres has begun to publicly criticize Madres-Linea Fundadora during their weekly marches in the squares. Madres from the Asociación, for example, have carried signs that explicitly put down many of the Linea Fundadora’s strategies for keeping the human rights movement alive, such as their ideas regarding the construction of memorials, monuments and museums. These public conflicts have not been well received by the media and the general public, who at one time idealized the Madres de Plaza de Mayo collectively as one of the best representatives of the human rights movement.41 Today, instead, critics question the Madres’ ability to effectively continue with the struggle for truth and justice regarding the disappearances.

Paradoxically, the same weekly gatherings that originally contributed to the maintenance of cohesion among a widespread network of Madres separated by geographic distance today threaten the unity and continuity of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo as an effective grassroots alternative to the more bureaucratic and formal human rights organizations of the Argentina human rights movement.

41 Many in Argentina believe that the Madres’ weekly gatherings in the plazas have contributed to the formation and maintenance of a collective memory regarding the disappearances and the troubled events experienced by Argentina in the recent past.
In conclusion, I would like to offer three suggestions that I believe are of theoretical significance for the study of memorial landscapes. First, the Madres’ different strategies for memory and commemoration indicate that memorial landscapes can take place at multiple spatial scales simultaneously, ranging from the body to different elements of the built environment. This is instructive because much of the work on landscapes of memory to date has focused on analyses of single landscapes at a given particular scale. Second, I have shown that the Madres weekly “collective rituals” in the plazas today represent and embody the Madres’ competing geo-politics of memory. Specifically, conflicting discourses and practices regarding the politics of memory today find a place for visible expression during the Madres’ weekly performances in plazas across Argentina. This is revealing because it demonstrates how different landscapes of memory that are constructed at—and operate through—a variety of spatial scales can clash together in a single place. It also further clarifies how places operate as a nexus of relations and processes that occur at different spatial scales. These first two conclusions are thus suggestive of ways in which we can begin thinking about landscapes of memory through a more relational understanding of space, scale, and place. Finally, and in terms of the relations between identity politics and memorial landscapes, the case of the Madres supports Moore’s (2000) suggestion that the physical expression of memory in the landscape and the built environment is often related to current social struggles and conflicts among different interest groups. The case of the Madres shows that what is usually seen as a landscape of memory is not so much a reflection of the past as it is the material expression of conflicts about the past—about the “politics of memory”—in the present.
CHAPTER 6

STRATEGIC NETWORKS, GEOGRAPHIC FLEXIBILITY, AND SYMBOLIC FRAMES: THE EFFECTIVE MOBILIZATION STRATEGIES OF THE MADRES

“At the beginning, we did much more than other human rights groups in Argentina. We began traveling abroad to tell the world what was going on in Argentina. Abroad, in Europe, they understood our pain. In France, in Italy, in Norway, and in Denmark, they gave us a hand” (personal communication, October 1999).

6.1-The enduring appeal of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo

On March 24, 2001, the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires saw the mobilization of more than 50,000 people who gathered to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the day the military took control of the government in 1976. Activists gathered in the square to repudiate the dictatorship and to honor the victims of state sponsored terrorism that characterized one of the darkest periods of Argentine history. The massive gathering was the largest popular human rights demonstration in Argentina in the last decade and took many people by surprise given the weakening of the Argentine human rights movement throughout the 1990s (see Jelin, 1998). Many of those attending the massive
demonstration were affiliated with different human rights organizations and political parties. There were also famous intellectuals, artists and celebrities. But there were many others who came to the Plaza spontaneously because they “felt” they had to be there (Gutman, 2001). Among these were families with children and teenagers born after the military government who had never experienced the horrors of the dictatorship.

The demonstration started in front of the National Congress and moved slowly along the Avenida de Mayo, one of the most historic avenues in Buenos Aires, towards the Plaza de Mayo, where the festivities, speeches, and a music and poetry festival were to take place. When the popular demonstration reached its climax, the loudspeakers around the Plaza de Mayo started to broadcast the voice of Subcomandante Marcos, leader of the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, in a live phone conversation. Marcos addressed the crowd for several minutes, giving a speech where he reminded everyone of the role that historical memory can play in constructing a more socially just future for Argentina and Latin America.

Marcos’ words were extremely appropriate for the occasion because organizers had named the event “Encuentro 25 años, memoria, verdad y justicia”, or what roughly translates as “Memory, truth, and justice – Together after 25 years”. Memory, not forgetting, remembering the past so that history would not repeat itself, was at the core of the motivations for the event. A few minutes after Marcos’ telephone message was delivered to the crowd, one of the organizers of the event also addressed those gathered in the Plaza de Mayo. In the speech, the speaker reconnected the past struggle for social justice in which the disappeared themselves engaged with the current struggle for truth and justice in Argentina, 25 years later.
The organizer who addressed the crowd after Marcos' message was none other than one of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. In fact, the successful event in the square had been organized and orchestrated by *Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora* in Buenos Aires with the support of over 200 social movement organizations and other activists and popular groups, unions, and political parties (Gutman, 2001). *Madres-Linea Fundadora*, the main organizer and protagonist of this event, had headed the wide column of demonstrators who walked from the Congress to the *Plaza de Mayo* together with another group of women human rights activists: the *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*.42

Earlier that day, another group of *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* from Buenos Aires (the *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo*) had conducted another popular demonstration in the *Plaza de Mayo*. The event had also drawn a big crowd, though those who attended the event were mostly activists from the extreme left of the Argentine political spectrum. There were about 25 different groups that joined the *Asociación Madres*, including anarchists, communists, socialists, independent *Madres* support groups from different neighborhoods and localities in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area, university students,

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42 *Abuelas* (grandmothers) *de Plaza de Mayo* was born in 1977 as an offspring of *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, as many women expressed their concern not only for their disappeared sons and daughters but also for their disappeared grandchildren who had been kidnapped together with their parents (also, in other cases, women had been “disappeared” while pregnant and some *Madres* wondered if their daughters had given birth to a child while in captivity). Since then, many *Madres* organized as *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* (some of them acting in both groups, some others only as either *Madres* or *Abuelas*). The aim of *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* today is to locate the grandchildren who disappeared and to restore them to their legitimate families. Like the *Madres*, *Abuelas* also is working to create conditions that will guarantee that these terrible violations of children’s rights never occur again. They also demand punishment for all of those responsible for the dissapearances. For a complete history and account of activities of *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, see Arditti (1999).

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as well as some human rights activists who also identify as being to the left of most of the other human rights organizations in Argentina. The leader of the Asociación Madres also addressed the crowd of demonstrators, declaring, among other things, that the Plaza de Mayo "...is the place where our dear 30,000 [disappeared] live" (quoted in Caldero, 2001). She also reconnected past with present by making reference to the symbolic character of the Plaza de Mayo in the struggle for human rights in Argentina.

The impressive number of people who attended both popular demonstrations following the Madres de Plaza de Mayo of both organizational affiliation in a day of commemoration was a reflection of the Madres' sustained and impressive mobilization appeal in the present, almost 25 years after they first met. Today, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo (irrespective of their organizational affiliation) are the most appealing community of activists in the human rights movement in Argentina. During the economic and institutional crisis in Argentina that begun unfolding in late 2001 and continues at present, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo were one of the only groups that were received by Argentina’s interim president as massive demonstrations and rioting were taking place in most major urban centers in the country. The Madres had been an active part of these popular uprisings. The government, in an attempt to calm down the social turmoil, understood that meeting with the Madres would be equivalent to sending a sign to the rest of society that the government cared about people and that the president was willing to listen to the demands of activists and society in general.

The appeal of the Madres through the years and even at present time can be explained with reference to the symbolic dimensions of their struggle that I have already examined in the previous chapters, such as the visibility that their weekly collective
rituals in plazas across the country have earned them over time. The performative and
symbolic dimensions of their practices of resistance are some of the dimensions that I
have already brought to bear to explain the Madres' mobilizing appeal. However, there
is more to explaining the effectiveness of the Madres in mobilizing others on their behalf
and in gathering the support and resources that have been critical to their survival over
the years. In relation to this, there are two connected questions I want to answer. How can
the Madres' impressive capacity to mobilize others on their behalf be explained? What is
the relation between the Madres' support networks and the duration and sustainability of
their activism?

In this chapter I suggest that the popular appeal and mobilizing capacity that the
Madres enjoy today can also be explained with reference to the way in which,
historically, the Madres have been able to construct relations with other groups of
supporters from different sectors of civil society (i.e., inter-organizational networks) in a
much more effective and sustained manner that any other human rights group in
Argentina. In continuing with the geographic perspective that guides this study, the main
issue I address in this chapter relates to the flexible spatiality of the Madres' inter-
organizational networks. My focus on the flexible spatiality of the Madres' networks
refers to the way in which the Madres, over time, have constructed dynamic connections
and relations with other groups across geographic scales (i.e., both in different places in
Argentina and around the world), sometimes simultaneously, sometimes independently of
each other. I argue that such flexible spatiality distinguishes the Madres' activism from
that of other groups in the human rights movement in Argentina and Latin America.
Therefore I suggest that an examination of the social and geographic constitution of such
networks (and of their evolution over time) is key to explaining why and how the Madres have been able to effectively maintain a continued stream of mobilizing support over more than two decades.

The two different events that took place in the Plaza de Mayo during that day of commemoration in March 2001 are also useful to compare and explain the current differences between the ability of the two organizations of Madres (the Asociación Madres and Madres-Linea Fundadora) to mobilize other activists on their behalf. On the one hand, the events of March 2001 showed how Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora as a group was able to work in coordination with the majority of both national and international human rights groups and with an umbrella of social movement organizations and activists who showed their support and contributed crucial resources that made their event a success.

On the other hand, the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo did not receive the support of the human rights movement at large. This is in spite of their being one of the most famous human rights groups in Latin America. Their event was not endorsed by activists from other social movements or by large workers’ unions either. On the contrary, the Asociación Madres relied mostly on an indigenous or proprietary (but not necessarily local) network of support that they have patiently assembled over the years.

How can we explain these differences between the two Madres’ organizations? Why did Madres-Linea Fundadora rely on an external network of support? Why, on the other hand, was the Asociación Madres helped by their own network of supporters? What are the different geographies of such networks? And what difference do these different
network geographies make in the mobilizing effectiveness of the two Madres’ organizations today? This is the second set of questions that I address in this chapter.

In sum, in this chapter I pursue two goals regarding my analysis of the Madres’ activism. First, I want to document and explain the overall effectiveness of the Madres’ mobilization strategies over time in relation to their development of inter-organizational networks that operate at a variety of geographic scales. Second, and in light of the differences and conflicts among the Madres that I addressed in Chapter 5, I also want to compare the spatialities of the Madres’ different inter-organizational networks that have emerged since the Madres’ organizational division in 1986. My goal is to explain how different types of organizational styles are related to the formation of diverse inter-organizational networks. In turn, the analysis of such a relationship is useful to explain how the two Madres’ groups differ in their capacity to achieve the support of other social movements and activists.

At a more general level, the analysis of the Madres’ inter-organizational networks that I pursue in this chapter also speaks to a broader concern regarding the sustainability of collective action. In Chapter 4, I showed that the analysis of place-based collective rituals and performances sheds light on how activists sustain geographically extensive interpersonal networks. I now argue that there are other processes related to the construction of networks that also contribute to (or can account for) the sustainability of collective action. Therefore, drawing from different theoretical avenues, I want to consider the role that networks based on links between members of different activist groups play in mobilizing resources that are crucial to sustain collective action over time.
The chapter proceeds in the following way. Section 6.2 discusses conceptual issues regarding social movements and the construction of inter-organizational networks of support. I briefly review the social movement, geography, and network literature to tease out conceptual insights regarding how activists effectively mobilize through networks that connect them with other groups. My goal is to offer a synthetic approach that specifies more clearly the way the spatiality of inter-organizational network relations is crucial to understand how activists can effectively sustain collective action.

In section 6.3, I analyze the Madres' success in achieving the support of many others groups since the early years of their activism through a geographical history that combines data from archives and interviews. My main goal is to reconstruct the Madres' inter-organizational networks by paying specific attention to the way in which the development of network bridges constructed at different spatial scales contributed to the groups' successful accumulation of resources useful for their mobilization. I also position the Madres' experiences in light of the experience of other social movements in different contexts that have also successfully mobilized and achieve the support of others in the past.

In section 6.4, I continue developing the same theme, but focus specifically on a comparison of the Madres' inter-organizational networks since their division into two groups in 1986. I focus not only on the tangible and measurable connections of the Madres' inter-organizational networks but also on more symbolic and latent relations that one of the groups, the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, establishes with other groups through the framing of places of symbolic importance. Throughout this chapter, I
offer an overall argument that clarifies the importance that strategic and geographically flexible network relations play in the effective assembly of resources that social movements need to mobilize and sustain activism.

6.2-Networks and resources in the mobilization of social movements

Over the past three decades, scholarly work on collective action has shown that the formation of inter-organizational or external networks of organizations and groups is critical to the development of social movements. Research has shown that networks of support are crucial in the effective mobilization of activists and social movement organizations. As Rosenthal et al. (1985) have explained, the ultimate effectiveness of collective action depends on the mobilization of support. In order to succeed, social movements must find allies among other groups because institutional routes for action are not always available.

Such claims about the importance of inter-organizational networks have been empirically grounded in several analyses of the evolution of social movements in the context of globalization. For example, through case studies of the environmental, human rights, and women’s movements, and focusing explicitly on the transnational dimensions of social movements’ networks of support, scholars have found that social and inter-organizational networks of different kinds contribute to linking activism across different contexts and places (Crugel, 1999; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Taylor and Rupp, 2001). These studies have shown that the combinations of different types of inter-organizational networks ultimately create larger transnational webs of support that facilitate effective collective action.

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Based on a relational definition of social movements\(^4^3\) and drawing from resource mobilization theory\(^4^4\), scholars have paid specific attention to the role that networks play in the exchange of information and other resources necessary for the recruitment of activists and the mobilization in general (see, for example, Rosenthal et al., 1985; McAdam, 1986; Klandermans and Oegema; 1987; Staggenborg, 1989; McAdam and Paulsen, 1993; Diani, 1995; McArthy, 1996).

Whether explicitly or implicitly, both resource mobilization theory and more abstract theories of social networks share a concern with explaining how resources are exchanged through different types of relations among a variety of actors. Network scholars have suggested that the different positions occupied by actors within a network have implications for establishing who has more access to resources and opportunities for control (Knoke and Kuklinski, 1982; Burt, 1980, 1992).

Social movement scholars have drawn from these insights and demonstrated how the exchange of resources such as financial contributions, shared memberships, organization of support for activities and rallies and other initiatives through networks

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\(^4^3\) Definitions of social movements as "networks" linking a variety of actors involved in a multiplicity of types of relations—networks of networks—are increasingly common in the social movement field (see Diani, 1992; see also Chapter 2).

\(^4^4\) Resource mobilization theory has been one of the most influential perspectives in the analysis of social movements in the past three decades. This theoretical perspective is based upon political sociology and economic theories and emphasizes the primary role that social movement organizations play in the mobilization, recruitment, and duration of social movements. In particular, research based on the resource mobilization perspective pays close attention to the ways in which social movements obtain and aggregate resources (McAdam, 1982; McArthy and Zald, 1973; 1987; Zald and McCarthy, 1979; Gamson, 1975).
play a critical role in the success of the mobilizing strategies of social movements (McCarthy and Zald, 1973, 1987; McAdam, 1982). As has been the case with much social movement research to date, neither social movement nor network theory awards much attention to the role of geographic dimensions in its discussion of the way social movements mobilize and access resources through networks.

However, taking a cue from recent research in political geography (Adams, 1996; Herod, 2000) and relating it specifically to the case of social movement mobilization through networks, I suggest that it is possible to raise new questions regarding the geographic dimensions of social movements' inter-organizational networks. Specifically, the question I want to entertain here is: how do the geographic dimensions of different network relations impact on the way social movements assemble resources that are crucial for the sustainability of their mobilizing strategies?

Research in human geography has demonstrated that paying attention to the articulation of geographic scales is a critical element in explaining the organization, development, and outcomes of both formal and informal political processes. Geographers have begun to pay increasing attention to the effects of geographic scale in the mobilizing strategies of social movements and other forms of political organizations and activism, such as workers' unions. In effect, it is now commonly argued that the effective mobilization of informal politics often requires the development of networks of associations that transcend the local scale (Murdoch and Marsden, 1996; Herod, 1997; Cox, 1998; Herod, 2000). For example, in current analyses of the geography of organized labor, "scaling up" (i.e. making connections outside of the local, creating transnational connections) is considered a strategy that increases chances for the effectiveness of labor
struggles. This notion is also prevalent in much research on transnational collective action that emphasizes new communications technology for social movement mobilization (Edelman, 1998; Adams, 1996; Ribeiro, 1998).

Despite this emphasis on the advantages of transnationalism, other geographers have offered more nuanced arguments about the relations between geographic scales and effective organization. For example, some scholars have begun to challenge the necessity of “scaling up” as a strategy for effective mobilization and suggested instead a “multiscalar” notion of strategies of collective action (Castree, 2001). Rather than implying that a simple progression from the local to the global leads to the successful mobilization of activists, it has been recognized that effective mobilization can occur through the articulation of strategies of resistance that do not privilege any one single scale of action. Rather, effective political organization might occur by taking advantage of the different benefits that emerge by organizing at multiple geographic scales. Such benefits are related to the needs and particularities of different struggles and to the context in which the struggle takes place (see for example, Miller 2000).

Unfortunately, when thinking about the role of social networks, geographers still invoke “networks” as a metaphor to explain the multiscalar dynamics of collective action (see for example, Castree, 2001, 286). The limitation of the metaphorical understanding of networks is that the different types of relations that are established through webs of social connections remain unclear despite a relational understanding of spatial scales and the adoption of a network vocabulary.45 As I have argued in Chapter 2, networks are

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45 For a critical discussion of the use of spatial metaphors in human geography, see Smith and Katz (1993)
more than just metaphors. Networks are dynamic social constructions that result out of the actions of actors who establish relations with each other. Such relations in turn create different network patterns with important implications for social processes (Nohria and Eccles, 1992; Adams, 1998). Therefore, networks cannot be considered just as metaphors, because the social relations that circulate through a network are constantly changed as a result of them being "networked" in the first place.

Network theories from economic sociology offer a powerful alternative to understand how actors in a network are affected by the relationships of which they are a part. By combining insights from research on social movement networks and on the spatiality of collective action, I suggest that it is possible to specify how different network relations that operate at a variety of spatial scales facilitate or constrain the access to resources available elsewhere or to positions of power and control. In the following accounts of the evolution of the inter-organizational networks of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo I analyze and specify the impact that geographic scales and context have on network relations known to facilitate or constrain accessing resources that are crucial to sustain collective action.

6.3-Mobilizing resources: the Madres' strategic bridges and flexible networks

The mid-1970s in Argentina saw the emergence of several human rights groups and organizations attempting to bring attention to the human rights violations of the military government (see Jelin, 1995). In general these nascent organizations found it difficult to assemble the resources necessary to sustain activism in an environment of strict government control, legal or illegal repression, and political violence. The historical
context also played a negative role in the development and sustainability of a network of human rights activists because the prevailing conditions limited activists’ organizational capacity. Yet, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo were more effective than other groups in mobilizing. How can we explain such differences in effectiveness? I suggest that the specific network strategies deployed by the Madres were more effective than the strategies adopted by other groups.

Originally, the Madres (like many other groups) were unable to attract local media attention, obtain legal advice and support, and amass money and other resources necessary to mobilize within Argentina. Their strategy to overcome these constraints, however, was different than those of other groups. From the beginning, the Madres did not feel comfortable working with the other human rights organizations. The Madres’ approach to politics, characterized by what Lichterman (1996) calls a ‘politics of personalized commitment’, did not fit well with the more bureaucratic approach that other human rights groups were following. The Madres did not have access to – and chose not to participate in – any formal network of support within Argentina. Instead, the Madres turned to different translocal and transnational sources for support. Initially, the Madres turned to international players who were established in or visiting Argentina at the time of the Madres’ first activities. Additionally and later on, the Madres turned to Argentines in exile and to others in Europe and North America for help.

The Madres’ connections with foreign journalists working in Argentina were the initial critical component in their assembly of a transnational network of support. For
example, Jean Pierre Bousquet, a French journalist working for France Press in Argentina in 1977, discretely followed the Madres during their initial illegal gatherings in the Plaza de Mayo, taking notes on their activities and reporting to his offices in France whenever the Madres were beaten or arrested. One of the original 14 Madres recalls:

When we walked in the Plaza those first days, Jean Pierre Bousquet watched us from the distance. He saw the ways in which we were beaten and taken. He had an office close by and some us began stopping by and asking him to send a telex to France telling how many Madres he had seen in the Plaza, and how many were beaten and detained. Those were the first steps we took (personal communication, 1999)

Through their contacts with the French journalist, the Madres quickly learned that the international press could make a significant difference in helping them achieve visibility. They therefore took advantage of every opportunity that became available. The Madres staged public displays of civil disobedience during visits of foreign officials to Argentina because they knew that there would be foreign journalists covering the events. One of these memorable actions, giving the Madres visibility around the world, occurred during the visit of Cyrus Vance, American Secretary of State under the Carter administration, to Argentina in 1977. As one of the Madres who participated in the action explained:

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46 Jean Pierre Bousquet later published what is perhaps the first book about the Madres. The book was entitled *The mad women of the Plaza de Mayo* in reference to the way in which the Argentina military used to describe the Madres publicly.
When Mr. Vance was visiting Buenos Aires, and during one of his public appearances in an official event that took place in Plaza San Martin, we showed up unexpectedly. We were shouting and asking for the disappeared. Members of the foreign press immediately turned their cameras towards us, and took pictures. A picture of a group of Madres shouting circulated around the world. But the picture and the event was not even known in Argentina, only a few people here knew about it (personal communication, 1999).

Such public disruptive activities and the attention of the press soon began to pay off in more significant ways. During the soccer World Cup, hosted by Argentina in 1978, one critical event changed the trajectory of the Madres' strategies for achieving support. A Dutch television crew had learned about the Madres' gatherings in the Plaza de Mayo and decided to go to the square to film the Madres. To the surprise of many, the opening television coverage of the World Cup in the Netherlands began with footage of the Madres in the Plaza rather than with images of the official opening ceremonies. This event put the Madres on the international media stage and began an avalanche of support from the Netherlands and Europe, in particular from women's groups who took on the cause of the Madres, supporting it from abroad. The current president of the Asociación Madres recently recalled this event as one of the most important in the history of the Madres:

The television broadcast of the Madres in the Plaza in the Netherlands was like an earthquake. Immediately after, Dutch women wrote to us and basically said that they were there for us. (Bonafini, quoted in Iramain and Nielsen, 2002)

47 The Madres staged similar public disruptive activities during the visits of several other important government officials from other countries.
The aftermath of this television broadcast in Europe was extremely positive for the group. After the initial publicity, the first international *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* support group developed in the Netherlands. Among the founders of this group was Liesbeth Den Uyl Van Vessem, an active feminist and wife of the Dutch prime minister at the time. Her support was not limited to lobbying on behalf of the *Madres* in Europe. On more than one occasion and during the early years of the *Madres*’ activism (when the *Madres* were more vulnerable and were regularly beaten and arrested), Liesbeth Den Uyl Van Vessem traveled to Argentina and escorted the *Madres* during their public appearances in the *Plaza de Mayo* (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1990).

Encouraged by the results of these first international connections, the *Madres* decided to establish further contacts abroad. Specifically, the *Madres* sought the help of Argentines who had left the country at the onset of the military dictatorship as well as of grassroots activists and supporters. Many of the Argentine expatriates were relatives or friends residing in Europe who were willing to contribute to their cause and support their activities from their exile. For example, a few months after the organization of the support group in the Netherlands, another support group composed of Argentines in exile and others sprang up in France. The group, called SOLMA (*Solidarité Avec les Meres de Place de Mai*) (Solidarity with the *Madres* of the *Plaza de Mayo*) began demonstrating weekly (also on Thursdays, like the *Madres* in Argentina) in front of the Argentine embassy in Paris (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1980).
Soon after that, the Madres organized their first international trips. Two Madres representing the group traveled first to Europe, then to the United States:

After the World Cup, we decided to organize trips to Europe and the United States...places unknown to all of us. It was a great effort, we were afraid, we knew we would leave the country and we didn't know if we would be allowed to return...these trips started the period during which we got so much support from abroad. We had meetings and interviews with government officials and with grassroots organizations (Bonafini, 1988).

By 1980, the effects of the international trips and the visibility given to the Madres by the foreign press began producing tangible results on behalf of the Madres.

During the first trip to Europe, which included visits to the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, and Italy, newspapers covered the Madres' plight. During their stay in the Netherlands and thanks to the efforts of the Dutch support group and seven women and feminist NGO's (non-governmental organizations), the two Madres touring Europe were invited to a United Nations-sponsored conference on women that was taking place in Denmark. The Dutch government paid for the Madres' trip and conference fees.

Additionally, during the conference, the Madres were invited to Sweden by the Swedish Minister of Labor (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1980). As the Madres traveled throughout Europe, they made new connections.

Soon after, with the help of Argentines abroad, new support groups emerged in Italy, Spain, Denmark, and Sweden. The support groups also began publishing newsletters about the Madres and Argentina that were then distributed to different social movement organizations, unions, and even members of government in Europe. One of the Madres explained that:

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Our sustainability during those initial days, it was thanks to Europe. Without Europe, we would not have lasted much longer. For example, Mr. Francois Mitterrand helped us a lot. I met him before and after he became the French president. Whenever the military wanted to do something bad to us, wires asking about our well-being would begin pouring from Europe to Argentina. Thanks to requests from important people in Europe, the military could not do too much to us (personal communication, 1999).

A trip to the United States in the late 1980s also proved to be very important as a way to mobilize support for the Madres. The Madres who traveled to the United States held meetings and interviews with local media, human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, and with the Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1981a). But also important were the high-level meetings that the Madres were able to secure. One of the Madres remembers that:

In the United States we asked for high-level interviews, because we did not even know what we were doing! We asked for interviews with the State Department, with congress, legislators. We asked for interviews with government officials whose names we knew from newspapers and those we believed...that they could help us. And we saw them, and they gave us the interviews (Bonafini, 1988).

Their strategy was successful. By 1981, a group called Friends of the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo formed in the United States. The same year, Argentines living in Canada together with local activists formed a support group in Canada. Also, in 1981, the Madres attended the first international congress of relatives of disappeared.

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48 The founders were mostly Democratic Party legislators and included Senators Edward Kennedy and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, among others.
People, which took place in Costa Rica (Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1981b). This event further connected the Madres to an emerging Latin American transnational network of human rights organizations (see Sikkink, 1996).

Connections with international actors not only resulted in publicity and lobbying efforts on behalf of the Madres’ struggle, but also allowed the organization to grow in ways the Madres had not originally imagined. The new international connections also allowed the Madres to access material resources that were impossible to amass in Argentina. For example, by the late 1980s, the Madres’ support group in the Netherlands collected a large amount of funds that were then sent to Argentina so that the Madres could buy a building to set up their offices:

The Dutch support group collected money that they then sent for us to buy an office, our first house. We were so disorganized until then, being kicked out of churches, or getting together at cafes where we could not stay long for fear of being arrested. We spent three years without a place to meet. We would not have lasted longer, I don’t think, without a place where we could safely meet (Bonafini, quoted in Iramain and Nielsen, 2002)

In sum, from the outset, the Madres began to assemble a support network that, much like their interpersonal networks of activists, did not remain localized. Rather, they established linkages to people in different places so that their support network was born transnational. The initial creation of a geographically extensive network was a crucial strategy to overcome the “scale-specific constraints” (Miller 1994) that they were facing in Argentina. Over the years, the Madres continued building this international network of support, even when they faced a more favorable institutional environment in the context of the democratization of Argentina. By the late 1980s, besides the support groups in the
Netherlands, France, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, the United States, and Canada, additional Madres de Plaza de Mayo support groups were functioning in Australia, Belgium, Germany, and Luxembourg and collaborating with the Madres' struggle. Because of the pressure of the European support groups, even the European Parliament established its own Madres de Plaza de Mayo support group within its institutional structure by the late 1980s. In Spain and Italy, where there have always been strong connections to Argentina as a result of historical links based on immigration, there were several Madres' support groups in different regions working simultaneously.

For the Madres, however, it was not just a matter of building a network that was not localized in Argentina. Their transnational connections were strategic because such linkages in turn connected the Madres with members of governments and progressive social movements across Europe and North America. In fact, the relations with Argentines residing abroad was not the most important strategic function of the network connections. Rather, the most important aspect of the Madres' initial network was that these first connections allowed the Madres to tap into other networks located elsewhere to obtain critical resources that were locally unavailable to them.

The experiences of the Madres parallels Burt's (1992) 'structural hole' argument about network relations. According to Burt, disconnections in a network often prevent actors from establishing strategic linkages with others. But these structural holes (Burt 1992) can be used as an advantage if groups build bridges that span the holes. In Burt's network theory of competition, a structural hole is a relationship of non-redundancy between two nodes, or a disconnection between players in a network (Figure 6.1).
Bridges are strategic network relations because they can maximize information exchange, minimize redundancy, and enhance actors' capacity to acquire or have access to resources. Regarding social movement networks, for example, bridges to other networks can become strategic relations that maximize opportunities for cooperative relations, the pooling of resources, and the joint planning of mobilizing strategies among different groups (Knoke and Wisely 1990). The development of strategic bridges over structural holes is paramount to explaining the development and sustainability of the Madres' support network because bridges are intangible relations between networks that strategically link one network to another.

Figure 6.1: Multiple actors in two networks linked by a bridge spanning a structural hole.
In the case of the Madres’ support network, groups of Argentines and other activists in Europe became intermediary nodes through which bridges to European social movements and government actors were constructed. These strategic bridges functioned as routes for the circulation of resources that the Madres needed, such as monetary contributions or legal advice (Figure 6.2). The location of these intermediary network nodes was also crucial, as activists in Europe had access to government and media channels that were willing to investigate the Madres’ accusations and bring them to the international public arena. The Dutch and French support groups, for example, constituted the earliest strategic intermediaries through which strategic bridges to important sources of resources were running—such as the Dutch parliament, the United Nations offices in Geneva, and later on, the European Parliament.

Later on, once the strategic bridges that guaranteed the flow of resources were secured and the Madres’ struggle had captured the attention of the international human rights movement, the Madres went on to expand their network by building additional linkages with other social movements and groups in Argentina. Besides increasing contacts with other human rights organizations, the Madres’ began working with local Madres de Plaza de Mayo support groups in different provinces in Argentina. Many of the members in the Argentine support groups were also members or supporters of other human rights and social movement organizations, thus indirectly linking the Madres to a host of organizations and groups in Argentina. Though these interconnections were not always coordinated, they further cemented the presence of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo as a key actor in the human rights movement.

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Figure 6.2: Schematic of the structure of the Madres' inter-organizational network. Since the beginning of their activities, intermediary "support groups" connected the Madres in Argentina with supporters in a variety of places through flexible bridges that span structural holes between the Madres and potential sources of resources. This schematic shows how, through the establishment of relations with two intermediaries, the Madres are connected to six other different groups that are willing to contribute to the Madres' cause at different times.
Additionally, the Madres began to enlarge and secure their own network of members by continuing to recruit other women in similar situations across the country (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of the Madres' recruitment efforts and the creation of chapters of the Madres' organization across Argentina).

Other human rights' organizations in Argentina (such as the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights, the Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights, and the League for Human Rights) followed a different strategy. Such groups sought to mobilize by prioritizing building linkages with other groups within Argentina first, seeking the support of other local and national human rights groups, unions, political parties and religious institutions. Many of these human rights organizations were already working together by the time of the formation of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. In fact, some activists in the more bureaucratic and established human rights organizations considered the Madres to be too naïve and did not make room for them to fully participate in their strategies.49

These bureaucratic social movement organizations also attempted to build international connections. As Sikkink (1996) explains in her analysis of the evolution of the Latin American human rights movement, different human rights organizations that had emerged across Central and South America since 1973 had begun to link up with a variety of international actors to protest rights violations and pressure for change. By the

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49 Inadvertently, this initial distrust may have pushed the Madres to seek support abroad rather than in Argentina.
time the Madres established their first international connections, other human rights groups in Argentina were also developing connections to other regional and international actors such as churches, NGOs, and academic and research foundations.\textsuperscript{50}

However, even though the more bureaucratic human rights groups were able to secure a broader coalition boasting a larger membership, technical and expert knowledge, and connections to different sectors of Argentine society and even abroad, they found it much harder to gather all the necessary resources to gain momentum and sustain collective action over an extended period of time. While some of the human rights organizations that preceded the Madres remained active after the period of the dictatorship\textsuperscript{51}, they were never able to achieve the large-scale support that the Madres achieved and enjoy today. This occurred in part because the more bureaucratic organizations lacked bridges (and the resources associated with them) of the kind that the Madres had assembled. The key difference was that the Madres built a geographically extensive network with strategic bridges that operated at several spatial scales, and such a network arrangement resulted in an effective way to sustain their mobilizing strategies over time.

Not only did the Madres construct strategic bridges to a variety of actors, they also worked towards the maintenance of such bridges while developing new ones—even during times when the strategic importance of some initial bridges had declined. In effect,

\textsuperscript{50} The U.S. based Ford Foundation, for example, funded several Latin American human rights organizations in their earliest stages.

\textsuperscript{51} Some of them are still active today, even though a few have shifted focus and others maintain offices but fail to draw many supporters or mobilize effectively.
the Madres worked very hard to maintain the connections with their support groups in Europe, Latin America, and North America. Almost every year since the creation of the support groups abroad, individuals or small groups of Madres continued traveling to Europe to meet with members of their support groups and to update them regarding their struggle for human rights in Argentina. Regular visits by small groups of Madres energized the support groups abroad and ensured their vitality. In turn, the support groups abroad diligently continued working on behalf of the Madres (e.g., publishing newsletters, lobbying government officials and influential personalities, collecting funds, and organizing gatherings of support groups to coordinate campaigns). Such activities effectively continued supplying the Madres with different kinds of resources.

On the other hand, when interest in the problem of human rights violations in Latin America decreased and the attention of international donors, NGOs, and foundations shifted towards other problem areas, other human rights organizations in Argentina began losing their international contacts. Many were disbanded and stopped functioning because of their lack of support. The same occurred with human rights organizations in other countries in Latin America such as Chile and Uruguay.52

The suggestion here is not that the Madres were the only group to create transnational connections, since the existence of an international network of human rights activism existed before the Madres formally organized. My point, rather, is that the nature and type of the Madres' transnational connections were significantly more effective than those of other groups. Whereas other human rights organizations merely

52 See Sikkink, 1996, for a discussion of the decline of the international human rights network in Latin America in the 1990s.

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constructed links to others actors abroad, the Madres’ worked towards the development of more permanent key intermediary actors in the network (e.g., the support groups) (see Figure 6.2). These new intermediaries were in turn connected to other external networks of support through strategic and flexible bridges. The establishment of new, stable, and trustworthy intermediary actors and the development of network bridges guaranteed a continued flow of resources that the Madres’ utilized for their sustained activism over the years.

The case of the Madres confirms that, by embedding themselves in sets of non-redundant ties (i.e., bridges), actors can increase their ability to exchange resources with trustworthy partners and minimize risks, enhancing the effectiveness of the relations and transaction that circulate through networks (see Meyer, 2000; Burt, 1992). For the Madres, the development of transnational bridges through key intermediaries located elsewhere was critical to the initial effectiveness of their mobilization strategy.

The geographic dimensions of the process of building strategic network relations, however, must not be oversimplified. At first glance, the experience of the Madres seems to suggest that social movements’ opportunities for sustaining mobilization strategies are enhanced by their capacity to develop geographically extensive networks of activists with connections to other groups across spatial scales. This conclusion, however, should not be taken as giving a necessary condition. The experience of other social movements in different geographical and historical contexts indicates that there are multiple paths to the construction of effective networks of support.

For example, in his discussion of the origins of the civil rights movement in the United States, Morris (1984) explained how the mass movement that gave rise to the
Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) and other civil rights organizations depended on organizational resources that were accessed through local churches and through the pre-existing local networks of chapters of existing social movement organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). As Morris explains, the networks of the SCLC and the NAACP were so intertwined that the organizations shared their personnel and funding bases (Morris 1984). Therefore, the organizational history of the US civil rights movement calls our attention to the importance of local and indigenous network resources for mobilization— as opposed to outside, non-local resources in the case of the Madres in Argentina. In fact, a look at the history of organizations such as the SCLC demonstrates that the strategic importance of geographic expansion (the ‘scaling up’ strategy) was often minimized because local chapters that were unable to aggregate sufficient resources alone were able to do so by establishing strategic network ties with another group also at their local level.

The examples of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina and of the organizations in the civil rights movement in the United States suggest that the sustainability of more effective mobilization strategies often requires collective actors to build geographically flexible networks with strategic bridges to other groups; the necessary condition for effectiveness entails the construction of strategic bridges to other networks, and is not specific to particular scales. Geographic flexibility refers to the capacity of the networks to operate at a variety of spatial scales to overcome scale-specific constraints that may arise out of context-specific conditions. It is not limited to geographic expansion, because expansion is just one strategy and may be effective only under certain conditions. For example, relative to networks that connect different groups
of collective actors, geographic expansion maximizes the strategic potential of network bridges (as it was at the beginning for the *Madres*), but local bridges may provide similar benefits if both another receptive group willing to cooperate and favorable political opportunity structures are present at the local level (as it is the case in Morris’s 1984 account of the origins of the US civil rights movement). *The importance of geographic flexibility ultimately is related to the capacity of a social movement or a group of activists to alter the spatial reach of strategic network relations when necessary to sustain effective mobilization strategies.*

### 6.4 The changing characteristics of the *Madres’* inter-organizational networks: the effects of the organizational division

The organizational division that took place among the *Madres* in 1986 (see chapter 3) changed the characteristics of their inter-organizational networks. As time went by, the two *Madres’* organizations developed different positions regarding human rights politics. Whereas *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* – *Linea Fundadora* remained positioned squarely in the realm of the Argentine and Latin American human rights movement, the *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* broadened its organizational objectives and discourses and began positioning itself as a group working for social change and human rights more broadly conceived. This division and the subsequent changes in organizational discourses and goals had profound effects on the relations that the *Madres* had already developed with other groups in Argentina and abroad.
6.4.1-Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora: the development of new local and trans-local bridges to the human rights movement

The Madres who left the original group to form the Linea Fundadora organization lost the majority of the connections and resources that all Madres together had assembled in their 10 years of existence. Because the decision of the Fundadoras to separate from the original organization was voluntary, the Madres who remained in the Asociación believed that they were entitled to keep all of the organization’s resources, including the offices in Buenos Aires that had been bought with the help of the Dutch support group. The separation from the original group also meant that the Fundadoras lost almost all of the connections with the support groups in Europe and the strategic bridges associated with them. This occurred, in part, because the division of the group was originally not widely advertised. Madres-Linea Fundadora feared that publicity generated because of the division would affect the credibility and the image of the group of Madres as a whole. Therefore, they chose to separate from the group without making too many public statements, in particular abroad. For a few years, Madres-Linea Fundadora functioned as an isolated group, with many in Argentina not knowing much about the division. As a result of the nature of the division, the majority of the support groups abroad remained under the control of or loyal to the Asociación Madres.53 Madres-Linea Fundadora was left with virtually no support from other groups.

53 The Asociación Madres had interest in keeping its key support groups abroad under its control and did not publicize the division of the group either. Whenever the issue of the organizational division was brought up by others, the Asociación minimized it and often described it not as a division but rather as “...a defection of some marginal members [about whom the Asociación] did not care much” (personal communication with the vice-president of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1999).
The new situation challenged the continuity and effectiveness of the newly formed Fundadoras' group, but it also provided them with new opportunities. While the group was left with no funds and no strategic inter-organizational connections, the division allowed them to establish new contacts under the parameters of their new organizational form—a more horizontal organizational structure with shared responsibilities and no established leadership in the group (see Map 3.3 and discussion in Chapter 3)—and goals regarding the struggle for human rights and the disappeared. Ten years after the formation of the Madres, the Fundadoras' view of how to continue the struggle for human rights was more consistent with the strategies of other human rights groups in Argentina.\textsuperscript{54}

Therefore, the group decided to begin establishing new contacts \textit{locally}. Madres-Linea Fundadora established much closer links to other human rights organizations of people who have also been personally affected by the disappearances, such as Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo); Familiares de Detenidos y Desaparecidos por Razones Políticas (Relatives of the Detained and the Disappeared for Political Reasons), and the Asociación de Ex-Detenidos y Desaparecidos (Association of People Previously Detained or Disappeared). They also began working cooperatively with other more formal and institutionalized human rights organizations such as the

\textsuperscript{54} The alignment of Madres-Linea Fundadora with other human rights organizations in Argentina is specifically related to the efforts for memory and commemoration as a strategy to sustain the human rights movement in a new institutional context (see Chapter 5). The Argentine human rights movement's emphasis on recovering and constructing a collective memory regarding the disappearances during the democratization period marks a shift from the mission of the movement during the previous years of the dictatorship, when the main goals were to publicize and find the truth regarding human rights violations (See Jelin, 1995, for a detailed discussion).
SERPAJ (Service for Peace and Justice), the Permanent Assembly for Human rights, the League for Human Rights, the Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights, and the Center for Legal and Social Studies.\textsuperscript{55} As I explained above, many of these organizations were already developing a coordinated network of support with other human rights group in Latin America and with some funding agencies in North America and Europe. Therefore, Madres-Linea Fundadora found it beneficial to work with these groups inasmuch as these new joint activities allowed it access to more resources without threatening its own independence.

Such an arrangement of cooperation and coordination between Madres-Linea Fundadora and the rest of the human rights organizations in Argentina continues today. Since 1995, for example, Madres-Linea Fundadora has met weekly with 8 other human rights organizations in Buenos Aires to coordinate activities and pool resources for campaigns and activities. Madres-Linea Fundadora remains independent, but the group works together with the majority of the human rights organizations in Argentina. This coordination is not limited to Buenos Aires. Chapters of Madres-Linea Fundadora in other provinces as well as independent groups of Madres across Argentina (see map 3.3 in Chapter 3) also connect with the local chapters of other human rights organizations across Argentina. For example, the Jujuy chapter of Madres-Linea Fundadora often coordinates activities and promotes joint campaigns with other local human rights groups.

\textsuperscript{55} For a history of the emergence and evolution of these Argentine human rights organizations see Jelin (1995).
in the northwest of Argentina. Similarly, the La Plata chapter of the Fundadoras group has begun working with the local chapter of the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights in the same city. Today such connections produce a widely interconnected network of human rights activists across the country.\textsuperscript{56}

Additionally, when possible, Madres-Linea Fundadora has established new contacts abroad. Right after the division, the Fundadoras were even capable of adding new members from the pool of Argentine women who were residing abroad and who had not become activists when the Madres originally organized in 1977. One of the most active members of the Linea Fundadora today, for example, joined the group in 1987, almost 10 years after Madres de Plaza de Mayo had formed. She recalls that:

In 1985 I returned [to Argentina] from exile in Mexico. I first went to [a meeting of the group] of Relatives of the Detained and the Disappeared. There I met a woman who had been a classmate of my sister in college... and she convinced me to join Madres-Linea Fundadora. Before, I had not wanted to join Madres because I knew of some of the internal conflicts regarding leadership in the group from stories I had heard during my activism in human rights groups in Mexico. (personal communication, 1999)

Moreover, the new relations of Madres-Linea Fundadora with other human rights groups in Argentina facilitated further contacts with human rights groups across Latin America. For example, after the division, Madres-Linea Fundadora chose to remain an active member of FEDEFAM, a transnational federation of relatives of disappeared people that operates throughout Latin America. In 2000, one of the members of Madres-

\textsuperscript{56} Members of the network recognize, however, that coordination of activities in this web of human rights organizations is often "...less than ideal" (personal communication with a member of Madres-Linea Fundadora, December 2000).
Linea Fundadora was also the president of this federation, effectively connecting and situating the group within the larger transnational Latin American human rights network.\textsuperscript{57}

And in recent years, some of the more entrepreneurial members of Madres-Linea Fundadora began establishing contacts with new support groups in France and Spain—by making connections with friends and relatives who are part of the Argentine diaspora in southern Europe. This attempt follows the strategy of constructing \textit{geographically flexible bridges}—the strategy originally followed by the unified Madres' organization starting in 1978— and has given Madres-Linea Fundadora new bridges that connect it to sources of support abroad that it has not had since the division of the original group in 1986.

6.4.2-Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo: framing symbolic places to establish strategic relations

The Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo retained all of the original support groups in Europe after the Madres-Linea Fundadora left the original organization.

Today, the Asociación Madres has support groups abroad in Australia, Canada, Denmark,
France, Italy (in Milan and Bologna), the Netherlands, Spain (in Barcelona, Lugo, Madrid, and the Basque region) and Sweden. Keeping the support groups has also meant that the Asociación remains in a better financial situation and connected to important actors in Europe and North America.\(^5\)\(^8\)

Over the years, the Madres in the Asociación perfected their maintenance of strategic bridges and trusted the support groups abroad with the mission of keeping the name Madres de Plaza de Mayo in the minds of the media, donors and important personalities abroad. By virtue of their position in the network, the support groups (acting as trustworthy intermediaries in the network) achieved great power and control over the Madres' inter-organizational network abroad. As the president of the Asociación recently declared:

> The support groups organize really impressive tours for us, and I do not have to worry about anything. I get there, and they tell me: “go there, now speak here, now go there”. And I know, I am convinced, that the support groups planned the event correctly...I don’t think that there is a human rights group [in Argentina] that has such an elaborate structure of support abroad. I am going to Spain next, for instance, and I don’t even have the faintest idea of how the tour has been organized or even where I am going to go, but I am sure that they have done a super job and that everything is going to go well. I mean, that kind of support is priceless (Bonafini, quoted in Iramain and Nielsen, 2002)

\(^5\) However, the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo no longer has contacts with supporters in the United States and has made a political decision of not traveling to this country because they believe that the United States continues to systematically oppress countries in Latin America. Madres from the Asociación justify their position in terms of the broader goals of social justice that they now embrace. See Diago (1988) for testimony from the president of the Asociación Madres about this issue.
Besides being embedded in relations of trust with the support groups abroad, the Asociación also has continued with the strategy of developing new bridges to other actors in Argentina. Nevertheless, the changing position of the Asociación regarding human rights politics has meant that the organization, over the years, has become isolated from every other human rights organization in Argentina. As I have detailed above, human rights organizations today work in coordination with the other group of Madres de Plaza de Mayo, the Línea Fundadora.

However, the radicalization of the organizational discourse of the Asociación and the broadening of their goals (e.g., their redefinition of human rights as economic rights), has given the group the chance to tap new allies outside the human rights movement. Taking advantage of this situation, in recent years the Asociación Madres has followed a strategy to create both “visible” and “latent” networks of support (Diani, 1995) across Argentina.59

For the creation of a visible and more stable network of support in Argentina, the Asociación Madres has worked towards the development of intermediary groups similar to the support groups in Europe. In Argentina, such groups are called “solidarity groups” and are formed mainly by activists from other social movements (such as organized labor), and student, community, and other grassroots organizations. Currently, there are solidarity groups across Argentina, such as in Buenos Aires, La Plata, Arroyo Seco, and

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59 According to Diani (1995, pp. 201) a visible network of support is defined as a network based on actual exchanges between organizations in which resources are pooled for a common endeavor. On the other hand, a latent network is composed of relations that could result in potential for cooperation as a result of actors’ multiple political affiliations and friendly involvements.
Bariloche. Moreover, some solidarity groups emerge temporarily and then dissolve as a result of particular campaigns that the Madres organize. This is another example of the flexibility that has always characterized the Madres' inter-organizational networks.

Many of the initiatives for the creation of these support groups have not come from the Madres, but, instead, have been initiated by activists who want to become politically involved and who see the Madres' project as an avenue for progressive political involvement. For example, the café-bookstore-library that the Madres currently run in Buenos Aires was the initiative of a group of young people and activists who admire the Madres. They believed that such a place would appeal to a variety of people and become a place of gathering for other like-minded activists or even for those who wanted to learn more about the Madres' goals and activities in a friendly environment. The Madres' café has been a success. Many of the Madres' public activities now take place in this venue that attracts a large number of people daily. The café has become a new place of gathering for the Madres and those who want to communicate with them. Since its opening, the café has become another home (besides the Plaza de Mayo and other plazas in Argentina) for the Madres' imagined community (see Chapters 3 and 4). Whereas the plazas remain both the symbolic home and public place of gathering for all Madres (irrespective of organizational affiliation), the café has become a more strategic place of gathering for the Asociación Madres. Many activists who support the Madres meet regularly in the café, either among themselves or with the Madres, to organize and plan activities and campaigns.

Besides the café, supporters and the Madres together run booths in open street markets in many cities in Argentina, produce radio programs on community stations, and
publish a newspaper and a magazine. Additionally, for the past two years, the Madres have begun running an “open university” in their Buenos Aires’ offices, where scholars and intellectuals offer free seminars and courses on different topics of critical social and political theory aimed at generating a better public understanding of Argentine history and of the Madres’ struggle. The goal is to connect the Madres with younger generations. In sum, the Asociación Madres has effectively enlarged its network of support in Argentina by broadening its discourse for human rights and redefining itself as an group fighting for social change more broadly—including but not limited to issues of human rights.

Such redefinition has been accompanied by the development and use of new spaces (some of them public, some of the private) where the Madres and their new supporters can gather and interact. New places of gathering such as the Madres’ café and the stalls in open markets provide actual physical settings where the Madres’ supporters can articulate their projects and strategies for action. Such places also render visible the Madres’ network of support in Argentina.

Interestingly, the redefinition of the goals and character of the Asociación has also helped the Madres create a latent network of supporters that are ready to mobilize on behalf of the Madres on special occasions. The Madres usually invite activists from other grassroots organizations and popular movements to be present in the plaza with them. During one of the afternoons I spent in the Plaza de Mayo, for example, the Madres had invited an activist from a group of unemployed people in Buenos Aires, a former Chilean political prisoner and activist for the Mapuche indigenous people, and an Argentine supporter leaving in exile in France to address the crowd. By having representatives from
other social movements together with them, the Madres appeal to a broader support base. Moreover, the Madres have been actively pursuing such supporters by courting them during their public appearances. For example, in their public discourses in the media and other public venues, the Madres from the Asociación often frame60 the Plaza de Mayo in strategic ways to obtain the support of other groups. This is particularly evident on occasions when the Madres plan demonstrations that would benefit from a large showing of activists, such as their annual 24-hour “March of Resistance” in the Plaza de Mayo. On these occasions, the Madres describe the plaza as the place of resistance for everybody and for every cause and popular struggle. The speeches given in the plaza every Thursday after the customary silent walks are testimony to this type of framing. Consider the following fragments of the president of the Asociación Madres addressing spectators in the Plaza de Mayo:

This is the Plaza where one fights against injustice. As we always say, it the Plaza of and for a lot of people. This Plaza is always full of ideas, of friends, and of allies. This Plaza demonstrates that borders don’t exist. (public speech, 13 April 2000)

This Plaza de Mayo is a place for transformations. It is place where we can all change. It is a place for everybody to make a compromise. A place to love what we do, a place to love our political commitments. (public speech, 28 October, 1999)

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60 The literature on social movement framing explains how social psychological dynamics condition the opportunities, organization, and actions that facilitate collective action. Framing, a crucial aspect of the mobilization process, is ‘the conscious and strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion a shared understanding of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action’ (Snow et al. 1986).
These narratives are suggestive. They indicate that when the Madres need the mobilizing support of other groups, they symbolically and discursively return the plaza they claim as their own place every Thursday to, as they say, el pueblo (the people). As the speeches insinuate, the Madres portray the plaza as a “utopian space” or a “heterotopia”, (Hetherington, 2001), a site from where new politics consistent with those of the Madres can be generated. During their public speeches, leaders of the Asociación frame the Plaza de Mayo as a site that both embodies the history of the most significant popular uprisings in Argentine history and as node in a new web of sites that have the potential to give rise to conditions that can transform the current social ordering. By appealing to both history and to the future and the potential for social change, the Madres’ framing of the Plaza de Mayo appeals to a large and diverse constituency and draw support from activists across Argentina and even abroad.

At a more general level, these examples also suggest that framing the identity of a place in the way in the way the Asociación Madres has been doing it for the past decade is an important step towards establishing connections to groups and supporters. If this frame alignment process is successful, namely if the linkages between the activists’ interpretive orientations are congruent and complementary (Snow et al. 1986), this becomes the equivalent of establishing flexible or latent network ties to a variety of supporters. In this case, a symbolic image of place becomes a crucial resource in the assembling of other resources necessary for mobilization. As far as the Madres are

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61 In his discussion of “heterotopias” or utopian spaces, Hetherington (2001, 51) explains that “…there is nothing ontological about such spaces that makes them a contender for utopic practice, rather it is a site’s importance in relation to other sites…that marks out its significance”
concerned, the construction of this type of flexible network tie to other groups is also dependent on the existence and duration of other types of pre-existing network ties (for example the bonds among Madres themselves that revolve around the strategic designation of the plaza as central to the group’s culture).

Interestingly, this suggests a way in which ties built around the symbolism of a particular place can be mobile: they can appeal to and mobilize groups in other localities. Thus, thinking about the strategic framing of places as a strategy to develop strategic network ties is a way to begin challenging the notion that all types of collective action motivated by an attachment to place necessarily reduce protest to the parochial level (see, for example, Harvey 1996: 324). As the experiences of the Asociación Madres shows, their attachment to the Plaza de Mayo has been crucial in mobilizing other human rights groups and other social movements across Argentina and Latin America.

6.5-Discussion: implications of networks’ spatialities for mobilizing outsiders

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that different kinds of network relations play a significant role in the efforts of a group of activists to mobilize other activists on its behalf. I have suggested that a group can effectively recruit support from others when activists are able to maneuver strategically the local and trans-local relations among the different networks in which they participate. Moreover, I have shown that the spatiality of organizational networks plays an important part in such strategic maneuvering. Specifically, I have suggested that the interplay between strategic ties and the spatiality of
network relations leads to the construction of geographically flexible networks that facilitate cooperation among different groups and provide possibilities for accessing resources that are crucial for sustaining mobilization strategies.

Regarding the relations between bridges and the spatiality of the networks, the comparison of the different inter-organizational networks of the two Madres' organizations is an instructive call to reconsider current claims about the impact that shifting the scale of struggle (either 'scaling up' or establishing a multiscalar strategy) has on the potential of social movements for greater effectiveness. Such reconsideration must include increased attention to the different types of network relations established across spatial scales. Consider the current differences between the diverse networks of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Línea Fundadora described above.

On the one hand, the Asociación Madres has become increasingly separatist, requiring that its members maintain an exclusive relationship with the group and precluding them from being part of other human rights organizations. The exclusive affiliation system of Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo has had some benefits, as it has helped create a tight network among Madres across spatial scales – in different localities in Argentina and even abroad. However, this network arrangement has isolated members from interacting with other human rights groups.

On the other hand, many members of Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Línea Fundadora also belong to other human rights groups within and outside Argentina. For example, through its activities in FEDEFAM, and by establishing connections with other
human rights groups, *Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora* has increased its visibility, promoted campaigns with other organizations, and become an active part of a transnational network of human rights organizations.

Thus, the case of *Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora* stands in sharp contrast to the case of the *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. In the *Asociación* the network arrangement is characterized by the absence of non-overlapping ties that could provide exchange benefits (Ettlinger, 2000). Under such a network arrangement, shifting the spatial scale of action does not necessarily benefit a group of activists because the ties in the network are not strategic and may only lead to redundant exchanges of resources (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973).

These insights provide further evidence regarding the relation between geographic scales and different types of network relations. They demonstrate that the varying organizational patterns of social movement organizations not only prefigure groups’ goals and internal dynamics (Arnold, 1995, 277; see Chapters 3 and 5), but also that specific organizational geographies condition the coalition-building strategies that organizations can pursue. Evidence from research on organizations in the American women’s movement has already demonstrated that decentralized organizational structures encourage strategic and tactical innovations, while centralized structures limit strategic choices (Sttagenborg, 1986). The cases of the two *Madres*’ organizations parallel these findings and provide further evidence regarding the possibilities for cooperation with other social movements that are available to different types of organizations.

The decentralized and non-hierarchical network pattern of *Madres-Linea Fundadora* (see Map 3.3, Chapter 3) has provided this group with ample opportunities
for coalition building across a range of geographic locations and scales. This has occurred in part because leadership is both socially and geographically diffused along their network. *Madres* in the *Línea Fundadora* have enjoyed autonomy in their choices and plans for how to obtain resources and support. On the other hand, the hierarchical character of the *Asociación* has reduced possibilities for cooperation because relations of power are both socially and geographically centralized in their network (see Map 3.2, Chapter 3). In effect, as I have argued in Chapter 2, the power-geometries of networks play a critical role in the mobilization outcomes of social movements. The way in which power and leadership is distributed differently in different types of networks results in different entanglements of power (Sharp et al., 2000). In turn, such geometries and entanglements have consequences for whether and how new social relations (of cooperation, for example) with other actors and networks can be established.

The evidence from the two different power-geometries of the *Madres*, however, does not indicate that a socially and geographically decentralized network pattern is *necessarily* more conducive to successful coalition-building strategies than a centralized one. The limitations regarding cooperation imposed by the social and spatial centralization of power in a hierarchical network can be overcome if members of such a group appeal to other spatial strategies that go beyond the Cartesian limits of their network’s power-geometry. The appeal to other imaginative geographies can challenge the limits imposed by certain power-geometries. Framing places is one such strategy. This is exemplified by the particular way in which the *Asociación* frames the *Plaza de Mayo* in their public speeches to supporters and the media.
The Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo is not the only group in the international human rights movement that relies on the symbolic framing of particular places to mobilize others on its behalf. Similar processes have been evident in the case of other human rights groups in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay in the last decade. For example, following democratization in these countries, many human rights activists have become involved in struggles over the fate of sites where repression by military governments once took place, such as clandestine detention centers (see Jelin 1998). While some groups have advocated the demolition of such buildings and the construction of monuments or memorials in their place as a way to erase all traces of the past from the physical landscape and to stimulate collective healing, others have vehemently opposed demolition (see discussion in Chapter 5). For some of these groups (including, for example, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora), the conservation of these places is crucial for sustaining emotional bonds among members. It is from within these sites that their collective identities (their shared identification as victims or relatives of victims of torture and murder by the state) emerged, and such sites act as the material embodiment of their identities.

Thus, the identification with particular places may actually be of strategic importance for the mobilization strategies of social movements to the point that it may contribute to the construction of strategic connections with activists from other groups – either in the same locality or elsewhere. This is possible because activists may deploy symbolic images of place to match the interests and collective identities of other groups and thereby mobilize others and gather support for their causes.
In his analysis of a large coalition of different anti-nuclear groups who opposed the construction of the Diablo Canyon nuclear plant in San Luis Obispo, California, Jasper (1997) provides an interesting account that gives further support for these ideas. According to Jasper, because Diablo Canyon – with its beautiful vistas and natural setting – had central place in the history and mythology of these groups’ subcultures, activists had a sentimental attachment to the place and thus would travel from distant localities to actions staged there. Jasper’s example illustrates how local groups of activists construct an alternative identity for a place (in this case, as a “sacred” site for all activists concerned with the environment) and strategically frame the identity given to the place to mobilize others outside their area (in this case, by encouraging a collective pilgrimage of activists to a site seen as “sacred” among movement members).

In conclusion, evidence from a wide range of social movements suggests that framing strategies built upon particular spatial imaginaries and symbolisms that resonate with others outside the organization are an effective tool to attract supporters and needed resources. The case of the Asociación Madres and the other examples above show that even groups of activists dealing with issues that do not typically concern problems in a particular locality or territorial community still often identify with symbolic places and, furthermore, utilize them in strategic manners to foment cooperation. However, whether the symbolic framing of places can be used strategically for the mobilization and aggregation of resources through the establishing of a strategic network tie depends on the subjective interpretations and decisions of those involved, because frame alignment processes are temporarily variable and subject to negotiation (Snow et al. 1986). The outcomes of framing processes can change over time and are often multiple; depending

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on the interpretation and meanings attached to a place or a place-based collective ritual, they can either foment or discourage building strategic bridges to other networks to engage in cooperative relations with other groups. In any case, a general concluding point here is that attention to the unfolding of such framing processes helps further conceptualize the linkages and relations between the personal dimensions of collective action and the spatialities of different strategies of social movement mobilization.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS:
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MADRES’ ACTIVISM

7.1-Assessing the effectiveness and consequences of the Madres’ activism

In the preceding chapters, I have provided an account of the spatiality of the Madres’ mobilization to explain how this social movement community has managed to sustain their activism for a quarter of a century. As I have shown, the Madres are impressive in that 25 years after their formation, they continue to be some of the most important players in the Argentine, Latin American, and international human rights movement. I have focused specifically on the spatiality of the micro-dimensions of the Madres’ activism—their emotional work, their collective performances, their personal and group conflicts and strategies for conflict resolution—as well as of the linkages of such micro-mobilization processes with meso-scale or mid-level processes—such as the Madres’ networking, resource acquisition, and coalition formation strategies.

Besides the explicit focus on spatiality, the preceding chapters share a concern with explaining the outcomes of the Madres’ activism. I have taken the analysis of the
relation between the duration of collective action and the outcomes of activism to be the organizing principle in this study because I believe that an examination of such a relationship has much to add to our understanding of the effectiveness of social movements. My concern with analyzing the relation between the sustainability of collective action and the outcomes of social movements also follows persistent calls from social movement scholars to further examine how organizational survival can help or hinder the accomplishment of social movements' broader agendas (Staggenborg, 1995).

My examination of the perseverance of the Madres' activism as an outcome of collective action is somewhat unusual because discussions of outcomes of social movements and of the effectiveness of collective action are not prevalent in the social movement literature. The lack of analysis of outcomes of social movements—in comparison with other issues in social movement research—stems from the fact that it is difficult to assess what counts for social movements' effectiveness and/or success. Much research on this subject has limited the scope of analysis to assessments of the political gains obtained by social movements (see for example, Gamson, 1975; Burstein, Einwohner and Hollander, 1991), with a focus on the relation between social movements and the broader formal political process. In general, success and effectiveness have been measured in relation to tangible gains. I argue that such an analysis is shortsighted.

Some feminist researchers of collective action have already emphasized that an assessment of the effectiveness of social movements needs to encompass broader

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62 Tangible gains include for example, the acceptance of a social movement as a legitimate player in the political arena or the obtaining of other advantages such as the passing of a law that fulfills some of the more explicit goals of the movement (Gamson, 1975).
dimensions, beyond political gains. As Ferree and Martin (1995) demonstrate in their discussion of the effectiveness and legacy of the feminist movement in the United States, even the institutionalization of a social movement must be considered an important dimension of its effectiveness because of the different organizations and institutions that a movement can generate, nurture, or influence. Along these lines, scholars such as Staggenborg (1995), Whittier (1995), and V. Taylor (1995) have argued that it is necessary to analyze the effectiveness of social movements in broader cultural terms, going beyond the measurement of gains achieved through the political process.

In this vein, I have not elaborated in detail the political gains that the Madres have generated for the human rights movement; that was not my goal.63 Instead, I have explicitly focused on analyzing the effectiveness of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo relative to their mobilization outcomes. Mobilization outcomes are crucial in assessing the effectiveness of social movements because they speak to their capacity to achieve organizational success and to their ability to carry out and maintain collective action (Staggenborg, 1995, 341). Moreover, my focus on the spatiality of mobilization outcomes fills a void in both geographic and sociological research on social movements. For example, geographers interested in the spatiality of resistance rarely have assessed their findings relative to the effectiveness of the movements they study. And as I have argued before, social movement scholars rarely pay attention to the spatiality of collective action and thus analyses and assessments of the outcomes and success of social movements have not contemplated spatiality as a critical dimension. Thus, I believe my analysis of

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63 Information and research on the political gains of the Madres has already been reported and is available elsewhere (see for example, Jelin and Hershberg, 1996).
the Madres’ activism is a foundation to build conceptual insights about the role of spatiality in the analysis of the outcomes of collective action. The case of the Madres allows us to establish future empirical parallels to the experiences of other social movements and, further, to make comparisons and general statements about how different degrees of social movement effectiveness relate to different dimensions of the spatialities of collective action.

I have conducted my analysis of the Madres’ mobilization outcomes following a critical theoretical perspective. I have shown that assessing mobilization outcomes requires attention to the personal and micro-scale dimensions of activism. For example, the effectiveness of the Madres in remaining together for 25 years has a lot to do with these women’s capacity originally to stop seeing themselves as victims and as passive mothers of the disappeared and to transform themselves into Madres de Plaza de Mayo. This has implications for the study of the success and failure of social movements. In effect, the failure of a social movement community to effectively mobilize others on its behalf might very well be the result of a lack of effectiveness in constituting a cohesive collective or in transforming members into collective actors in the first place.

My approach to the analysis of outcomes from a micro-level perspective has important epistemological and methodological requirements and implications. As I have argued in Chapter 2 and demonstrated throughout the study, the analysis of the social relations of activists and of their personal involvement is not amenable to conventional social science quantitative analysis. Rather, it requires detailed qualitative data analysis interpreted from critical social theory and cultural analysis perspectives. Such a critical and micro-level approach, however, does not necessarily preclude one from being able to

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establish more general theoretical principles (Ettlinger, 2002). On the contrary, throughout this study I have focused on the subjective dimensions of the Madres’ activism not only to explain the outcomes of the Madres’ mobilization strategies geographically, but also to render visible some of the broader implications of the Madres’ activism for the study of the spatiality of social relations.

7.2-Mobilization outcomes of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo: the role of spatiality.

The previous remarks regarding the assessment of effectiveness of collective action are intimately related to the case of the Madres because their mobilization outcomes have been impressive. In effect, in the context of the human rights movement in Argentina and Latin America overall, the Madres stand out as one of the most enduring communities of activists. The continuity of the Madres’ activism is significant. From their collective rituals and performances in plazas around the country to the strategic transnational connections established from the beginnings of their activities and sustained up to today, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo over the years have developed strategies of mobilization at different spatial scales that have contributed to the duration and perseverance of their activism.

The Madres’ perseverance indicates that there are lessons to be learned from analyses of the spatiality of social movements’ strategies of mobilization. I suggest that the Madres’ effective maintenance of their community of activists for 25 years—even in the face of changing external conditions and internal organizational conflicts—is
instructive regarding the importance of the spatiality of social movements’ mobilization strategies relative to the long-term mobilization outcomes of collective action in general.

Throughout this study, I have shown that what is significant about the Madres is not any one particular dimension of their activism per se (for example, their collective rituals or their symbolic framing of plazas in their public discourse to attract the support of others). Rather, it is the spatiality that all these different strategies have in common. My suggestion is that what is exceptional about the Madres’ activism is the way in which this social movement community has strategically managed the myriad of networks that it has developed and into which it has entered over the years. Moreover, as I summarize below, what is significant is how the spatiality of such networks has assured the duration and sustainability of their activism.

The Madres’ have become and remained embedded in a network of activists that extends across a large territory over more than two decades. Through the strategic efforts of leaders and very involved members to promote collective gatherings of Madres in plazas and other public spaces during their formative years, the visibility of a network that was born out of grievances and that was being sustained through the emotional work of activists increased significantly. The gatherings in plazas gave the Madres’ network a symbolic homeplace. Over the years, such a symbolic sense of place began playing a key strategic role in the maintenance of the organization(s). The symbolism of the collective gatherings in the plazas gave the Madres’ substantial visibility and physically located their network in places. Visibility and a location allowed more women to meet each other, facilitated recruitment, and permitted the struggle for human rights to reach remote corners of Argentina where the social and political realities were not conducive to the
development of human rights activism. Simultaneously, the gatherings in the plazas became an activity that further cemented the emotional bonds among women and their embeddedness in a growing network of mothers of the disappeared. The symbolic power of the collective gatherings in plazas allowed women to negotiate a new spatial imaginary for their community of activists. Their network became a place in itself. Their actual/imagined community became dependent on an open and flexible conceptualization of network/place that allowed women to be visible, to have a place in which to locate their emotions, to overcome distance, and to remain connected to each other, all at the same time.

Furthermore, over the years, the group gatherings in the plazas became collective performances that proved crucial for the perseverance of the Madres. It was through the performance of place-based collective rituals in plazas around the country (and around the world sometimes) that the Madres found a strategy to sustain the cohesion of a flexible and non-localized network of activists. Their weekly performances, together with their modification of the built environment in plazas around the country (e.g., paintings of their emblems on the ground), helped to symbolically embody their identities in places of strategic importance to the movement. This further contributed to the Madres’ feeling of proximity and of being together in the same place at the same time despite the fact that large geographic distances separated many of them.

The spatiality of the Madres’ performances also played another key strategic role in ensuring the survival and vitality of the Madres over 25 years. The organizational division that fractured the Madres’ network in 1986 could have potentially weakened or even terminated the movement, despite the Madres’ initial mobilizing success and
visibility. However, by developing “performances within the performances”, the Madres found a way to communicate their disagreements to each other without threatening the continuity of their activism and without discrediting their public image. Over the years, the collective performances in the plazas became mechanisms for conflict resolution that rendered visible the Madres’ different positions regarding human rights politics and the politics of memory and commemoration. By allowing their different positions to be played publicly at different spatial scales—from their own bodies to modifications of the built environment—during their collective gatherings in the plaza, the Madres found a way to mark, maintain, and even negotiate blurry organizational boundaries without threatening the continuity of a larger social movement community of mothers of the disappeared.

In sum, over the years, the Madres used specific spatial strategies—based on the symbolic power of places and performances and relying on a particular spatial imaginary of their own community—to deal with the particular spatiality of their own network of activists. I argue that such experiences demonstrate the key role of spatiality in mediating the relation between the duration of activism and the outcomes of the Madres’ mobilization strategies.

Similar lessons regarding the relation between the spatiality of the Madres’ networks and their mobilization outcomes apply to the development of the Madres’ inter-organizational networks and to their coalition formation strategies. While the creation of a transnational network of support is a significant development per se in the mobilization activities of any social movement, the point about the Madres goes beyond that. Within the transnational network that they created, they also established bridges across space.
(sometimes abroad, sometimes within Argentina, often both) that allowed them strategically to tap different networks for a variety of resources that proved critical for the duration of their activism. Moreover, such network bridges and the networks themselves were geographically flexible. Inter-organizational networks were not static, but rather exhibited a dynamic spatiality that encompassed different types of network relations that moved across different locations as local, national, and international political opportunities shifted as well.

Furthermore, when the Madres divided into two organizations, the spatiality of their networks also changed as a result of new organizational structures. The decentralized network structure of Madres-Línea Fundadora encouraged the creation of further bridges and further tactical coalition-building strategies. On the other hand, the more spatially centralized network of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo facilitated organizational maintenance but made coalition-building efforts more difficult. Yet, the Asociación managed to overcome the limitations of their new network spatiality by deploying symbolic framings of the Plaza de Mayo that appealed to potential supporters outside of the human rights movement.

The case of the Madres instructs us that the sustainability of strategies of collective action often hinges upon actors’ capacity to maneuver strategically different types of network relations across spatial scales. Managing the different spatialities of different types of networks in turn requires flexible adaptive strategies. Because of the mutual constitution of space and social relations, the spatiality of such adaptive strategies is also critical regarding their effectiveness and their outcomes. For example, the way in which the Madres have deployed certain spatial manifestations of memory during their
collective performances in the plazas has been crucial as a conflict resolution strategy designed to maintain organizational boundaries without damaging the public's spatial imaginary of a national community of *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*.

In sum, in these concluding remarks about the Madres I want to re-emphasize that the spatiality of social movements networks and relations is often imbricated in the outcomes of collective action. As the case of the Madres has shown, the deployment of certain spatial strategies—over and through networks of activists with their own geographic expression—mediated the extent to which a sense of cohesion among the Madres was more or less effectively sustained. Other spatial strategies of network building mediated the outcomes of their coalition-building efforts, also with different degrees of effectiveness.

However, I am not suggesting here that the spatiality of a network alone ensures the duration of collective action or other effective mobilization outcomes. Other mediating factors that I have not considered in this study are also crucial. For example, the ability to effectively mobilize resources through networks also depends on the level of competition for resources among social movement organizations and on the characteristics of the different social movements to which activists connect through strategic ties. Similarly, the sustainability of cohesion in the interpersonal networks of activists may relate to particular spatialities and spatial strategies, but such spatialities are also dependent on the diverse characteristics of the activists themselves, as well as on leadership, organizational styles, and social and cultural context.

An interesting example of the variety of mediating factors that together with spatiality condition the sustained cohesion of activists is Pardo's (1995) account of
Mexican-American community activists in Los Angeles. Pardo narrates the story of a group of women who were advised by a local parish priest to wear white headscarves over their heads and to meet regularly in a specific place to generate a feeling of group unity. The priest came up with the idea after he had watched a documentary about the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. The successful outcomes of the Madres inspired the motivations of the priest. Unfortunately, the strategy did not work. As Pardo explained, women resisted the practice because it did not have any significance to them. Women refused to be given a ready-made identity based on the experiences of women in other context. Moreover, women in this group achieved cohesion by deploying a different spatiality. Mexican-American activists did not to rely on an imagined community like the one of the Madres, but rather organized around their identification with their own territorial community: East Los Angeles, their own neighborhood. The concrete practices of the Madres did not make sense to those of Mexican-American women in Los Angeles because the Madres' practices and their associated spatialities were out of context.

Thus, at a more general level, I suggest that the concrete spatiality of the practices of the Madres or of other groups are not the most significant lesson of this study. Rather, I believe this study demonstrates that what matters is to recognize at the outset that there are different ways in which geography matters in the outcomes of collective action. The range of variation is wide and there is much room for further substantial work on this topic. This study has only shown a few of the many possible ways in which personal and organizational geographies mediate the degrees of effectiveness of collective action.

In conclusion, if one is to better understand the outcomes and effectiveness of collective action, the spatiality of the networks that generate and nurture collective action
and the spatial strategies that activists deploy to sustain them must not be overlooked. This study is an attempt to push further our understanding of the importance of a relational understanding of networks and spatiality in the analysis of social movements. I have done that by considering the spatiality of specific network processes that nevertheless are common across a number of social movements. Consistent with the evidence from this study, I suggest that an investigation of variation in the spatiality of social movement networks is better served by a view of networks that recognizes the importance of interpreting the significance of different relations in the light of theoretical concerns specific to the processes under consideration, because social movement processes and their spatiality are complex and highly dynamic. Further insights into the importance of the spatiality of collective action can be gained by pursuing an approach similar to the one in this study from a comparative perspective, focusing on analyzing the implications of variation in the spatiality of networks over time and on the variety of ways in which network cohesion and sustainability is achieved, or conversely, dissolved.
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