8. The Politicization of Motherhood: Case 2970 ♦ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

At the height of the Dirty War in the late 1970s, when most Argentines ignored the vanishing of thousands of fellow citizens, a group of women formed the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo to protest the disappearance of their children and grandchildren. Government commando units imprisoned children or gave those infants born in prison to childless couples who supported the regime. To call attention to their cause, they marched with diapers on their heads. The government initially dismissed them as crazy old women, but they attracted international attention and investigations began. Why did they march? One woman answered, “When someone takes away a son or daughter, you don’t measure what could happen to you. You go ahead first and do whatever you can.”

This claim, submitted to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, is typical of what motivated the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo to protest when most Argentines, including their husbands, simply looked away.

Silvia Angélica, of Argentine nationality, twenty-seven years of age, married. At the time of kidnapping on May 19, 1977, she was two months pregnant; seven months later the grandmother received the baby girl born in detention; Mrs. Corazza de Sánchez also has another little girl, four years old. Her identification card is number 6, 071, 079. She is a housewife and her address is: Bartolomé Mitre 2637, 2d Floor, 42, Federal Capital. Date of kidnapping: 5.19.77. Place: “El Clavel” Bar, located Avenue Pavón across the street from Lamús Station. Time: between 3 P.M. and 5 P.M. On the date, time, and the place mentioned, the victim was arrested by armed persons in civilian dress. She worked in a textile factory in the same city. At the time of the kidnapping she was two months pregnant. After seven months, she was taken to the home of her mother, accompanied by three persons, who, although dressed as civilians, belonged to police or security forces; they had a short meeting during which Mrs. Silvia Angélica handed her mother a newborn baby girl (five days old), stating that she had had the


9. La Libertad: A Women’s Cooperative in Highland Bolivia ♦ Benigna Mendoza de Pariente

In Latin America the popular classes left few records. Their system of learning relied on oral tradition, which stressed listening, recitation, and memorization over writing and reading. Today, scholars record the testimonies of common people and create a valuable data base for writing history. The testimony of Benigna Mendoza de Pariente, a member of La Libertad, a women’s savings-and-loan cooperative in Cochabamba, Bolivia, not only relates the facts but also the emotions and tone of her life.

I was born in Totora, about 130 kilometers from here. It was a very peaceful place; my parents have always lived there. I came to Cochabamba when I was about twelve, and I never went back again. I’m afraid of the trip, because you have to go by truck. One time I was on my way for a visit and I saw a truck nearly turn over. It made such an impression on me that I’ve never traveled anywhere.

I got married when I was very young and had eight children. My eldest girl is already twenty-four. The others came two years apart, down to my youngest daughter, who is eight. Last year two of them finished high school, and this year another one will graduate. I also have a daughter in the colegio (junior high school). They all want to go to the university or to a teachers’ college. But the teachers’ colleges in Bolivia have been shut since last year,