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About the Authors

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Mothers Misread: Conflicting Iconographies of the Plaza de Mayo



Colección Grafica Politica: Archivo de Artistas Juan Carlos Romero 1930-2017

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Introduction

*"I am a mother. I have two sons and a daughter-in-law disappeared. I like to cook and I have no education beyond the sixth grade; I don't have any degrees."*¹
—Hebe de Bonafini, 1986

These were the opening words of Hebe de Bonafini, first president of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, as she spoke to two attendees of Argentina's First National Women's Meeting in 1986. To the contemporary reader, Bonafini's statement might read as a traditionalist, even conservative, ideal of femininity. In reality, however, Bonafini spearheaded one of Argentina's most influential nontraditional social movements, formed in the throes of a brutal dictatorship at the end of the twentieth century. That Bonafini introduces the Madres de Plaza de Mayo through her role as a mother and individual targets a central irony in the organization. Since its establishment in 1977, Argentina's Madres de Plaza de Mayo has been envisioned through and about individual mothers' experiences of loss, but enacted via collective political protest. This paper will examine the intersection of individualistic and collectivist imagery produced by and about the Madres' movement in the final three decades of the twentieth century.

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo emerged in response to Argentina's Dirty War, carried out under Argentina's last dictatorship lasting from approximately 1976 - 1983. The Dirty War, so-called for its tactics of brutal authoritarian repression, followed a cascade of dictatorial regimes from the 1930s through 1950s.² What ostensibly began as a crusade by Argentina's constitutional government in the name of national security became the entry point for a brutal military government,³ led by former army general Jorge Rafael Videla, in a

¹ Nancy Saporta Sternbach and Zelia Brizeno, "Interview with Hebe de Bonafini: President of Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo," *Feminist Teacher* 3, no. 1 (1987): 16.

² Donald Hodges, *Argentina's Dirty War: An Intellectual Biography* (University of Texas Press, 1991), ix.

³ *Ibid.*

1976 coup.⁴ The military regime relied on tactics of terror, targeting Peronists, Socialists, and members of the Third World Church⁵ (among other political “subversives”) long after any real threat of guerilla warfare had been leveled. Notorious in Argentine history is the disappearance of several thousand such subversives, known simply as *los desaparecidos*.⁶ The National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, established under Argentina’s restored democracy in 1983, confirmed the disappearance of 8,960 people over the course of the Dirty War – a figure by no means considered exhaustive. The total number of people killed during the Dirty War is now estimated around 30,000.⁷ These *desaparecidos* were kidnapped from their homes, schools, work, and even off of the street, taken to one of 340 concentration camps for torture and assassination. In effort to conceal state violence, bodies of the victims were incinerated, buried in clandestine locations, or (most infamously) thrown into the sea.⁸ The majority of these “desaparecidos” were young adults between twenty and thirty years of age.⁹ Because the military junta targeted young activists, the vast majority of desaparecidos left behind living mothers; it is amongst these mothers that the Madres’ movement took shape.

Las Madres originally comprised fourteen mothers of these desaparecidos, who gathered at Buenos Aires’s famed Plaza de Mayo on April 30, 1977 with the intention of speaking to President Videla about their children’s whereabouts.¹⁰ When told by police that they could no longer loiter in Plaza de Mayo, the mothers began to march in circles about the square.¹¹ Within three weeks, the fourteen Madres had swelled to sixteen; by June 1977,

⁴ Marguerite Guzman Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (Scholarly Resources Inc., 1994), 19.

⁵ Ibid., 176–7.

⁶ Donald Hodges, *Argentina’s Dirty War*, x.

⁷ Cynthia L. Bejarano, “Las Super Madres de Latino America: Transforming Motherhood by Challenging Violence in Mexico, Argentina, and El Salvador,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 23, no. 1 (2002): 126.

⁸ Marjorie Agosin, *Circles of Madness: Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo/Círculos de Locura: Madres de La Plaza de Mayo*, trans. Celeste Kostopulos-Cooperman (White Pine Press, 1992), 1.

⁹ Marysa Navarro, “The Personal Is Political: Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo,” in *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements, Updated and Expanded Edition*, ed. Susan Eva Eckstein (University of California Press, 2020), 200–201.

¹⁰ Bejarano, “Las Super Madres,” 132; Navarro, “The Personal Is Political,” 203.

¹¹ Marysa Navarro, “The Personal Is Political,” 204.

over one hundred mothers had joined the cause.¹² It was not until 1979 that the Madres established a formal organization, but by 1982, the organization had a membership of 2,500 mothers.¹³ Despite kidnappings and arrests within their ranks, the Madres remained active.¹⁴ They march every Thursday at 3:30 PM before Argentina's governmental residence the *Casa Rosada* in Plaza de Mayo to this day.¹⁵ Their demonstrations demand a specifically articulated goal: recognition and records of the thousands lost under Argentina's brutal dictatorship.

Beside the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, a partner organization emerged in the form of the Abuelas. The Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, also established in 1979, comprised women whose grandchildren disappeared under the dictatorship. Many missing grandchildren were themselves the children of desaparecidos – either abducted with their parents or born in concentration camps across the country.¹⁶ Yet another sector of children were left orphaned when their parents were kidnapped; among these children, many were taken to the police and illegally adopted by wealthy members of the junta, therefore becoming a new semblance of the desaparecido.¹⁷ Twelve grandmothers followed in the footsteps of the Madres, meeting originally as the “Abuelas Argentinas con Nietitos Desaparecidos” (“Argentine Grandmothers with Disappeared Grandchildren”) and eventually becoming the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo. They partnered with the Madres, collecting photos of kidnapped women and their children and presenting writs of habeas corpus before Argentine judges.¹⁸ Like the Madres, the Abuelas continue their work in Plaza de Mayo today.

As organizations composed solely of women, the Madres and Abuelas must be read within the context of women's roles in twentieth-century Argentina. Considering the patriarchal society in which these women lived, the act of marching in public was itself a

¹² Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 70.

¹³ Navarro, “The Personal Is Political,” 203.

¹⁴ Ibid. 205–06.

¹⁵ Bejarano, “Las Super Madres,” 132.

¹⁶ Navarro, “The Personal Is Political,” 203.

¹⁷ Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 179; Rita Arditti, *Searching for Life: The Grandmothers of the Plaza De Mayo and the Disappeared Children of Argentina* (University of California Press, 1999), 62.

¹⁸ Arditti, *Searching for Life*, 55–56.

radical form of protest. The fourteen Madres who gathered in Plaza de Mayo in 1977 were largely housewives. Those few mothers who worked held the limited jobs available to Argentine women in the mid-twentieth century; they were primary-school teachers or social and retail employees.¹⁹ During the 1930s and 1940s, only men attended higher education in Argentina, meaning that the women who were mothers by the time of the Dirty War remained largely uneducated and unemployed.²⁰ Women's limited opportunities are a recurring theme within the Madres' autobiographical accounts. Hebe de Bonafini declares that, prior to the establishment of the Madres, "women were the consequence of their husbands: washing and ironing."²¹ Another mother writes, in a similarly despairing tone, that Argentina's "daughters had no possibilities other than graduating as teachers."²²

Significantly, "motherhood" in particular operated as a tool of misogynistic repression in Argentina during the dictatorship. Historian Cynthia Bejarano situates the state of women's rights in Argentina in the twentieth century within a larger history of Latin American familial expectation. She argues that "Latinas are expected to enact their citizenship in their roles as wives and as mothers raising respectable citizens of the state."²³ In Argentina, women's subordinate role in the family was reinforced just before the dictatorship under the administration of President Isabel Perón. Amongst other decisions which set back women's autonomy, Perón vetoed a policy which would have given women and men equal legal rights over their children.²⁴ The junta in Argentina relied on traditional household gender roles for legitimacy, often metaphorizing the nation as "una gran familia" ("a big family") with the military serving as "father."²⁵ In this model, the mother was an apolitical, domestic figure nonetheless essential in sustaining the metaphorical father and

¹⁹ Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

²¹ Nancy Saporta Sternbach and Zelia Brizeno, "Interview with Hebe de Bonafini: President of Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo," *Feminist Teacher* 3, no. 1 (1987): 17

²² Matilde Mellibovsky, *Circle of Love Over Death*, trans. Maria Proser and Matthew Proser (Curbstone Press, 1997), 15.

²³ Bejarano, "Las Super Madres," 143.

²⁴ Arditti, *Searching for Life*, 79.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

children of the nation. Motherhood was, therefore, inculcated into the nationalist project of Videla's government.²⁶ The female body also became a site of political control under the dictatorship, in that sexual assault was a common form of torture for female protestors.²⁷

Scholars have assigned meaning to the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo within broader social and political movements. Cynthia Bejarano identifies the Madres as the catalyst for a wave of "motherist activism," which demands rights for Latin American children, most recently in Mexico and El Salvador.²⁸ Marysa Navarro argues convincingly that the Madres and Abuelas transformed motherhood into a political category, citing members' disengagement with social and political protest prior to 1977 in contrast with their profound global impact.²⁹ Bouvard claims that the Madres' marches in front of the Casa Rosada were "but the first step in what would become a long act of defiance against the terrorist state established by the junta."³⁰ All three scholars share a tendency to read the Madres as part of a larger political project – whether that project be feminist, democratizing, or other. Significantly, however, the Madres and Abuelas themselves are quite resistant to such affiliations. The Madres' slogan "Bring Them Back Alive," adopted in 1984, stands a testament to their focus on retrieving information about the desaparecidos above all else.³¹ Their movement remains focused on this one goal, and even in collaborations with organizations like the National Movement of Housewives or the Socialist Feminist Center de Justo, they wield publicity only to promote their individual search for Argentina's missing children.³² Embedded in this isolationist approach to social change lies a central irony of the Madres' movement: while isolationist in their political goals, the Madres function through a structure of protest rooted in solidarity. Their weekly marches around Plaza de Mayo have nothing if not power in numbers. This paper will examine the visual and rhetorical

²⁶ Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 19.

²⁷ Bejarano, "Las Super Madres," 137.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁹ Navarro, "The Personal Is Political," 197.

³⁰ Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 71.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

³² *Ibid.*, 191.

iconography of the Madres' movement as a central site of this irony. An examination of written and visual materials produced by the Madres themselves reveals the mother's individualistic approach to social change, whereas comparable materials produced about the Madres from outside their ranks embraces a collectivist attitude. Comparative analysis reveals that the Madres de Plaza de Mayo envisioned an isolationist movement based upon individual struggle, while their work has been interpreted in popular culture and scholarship as a solidarity movement rooted in collective experience.

From Within: Individualistic Rhetoric and Isolationist Project

The language of the movement partially evinces the individualistic mode of social change envisioned by the Madres, which relies often on individual narratives as a catalyst for social change. Hebe de Bonafini's poignant "*I am a mother. I have two sons and a daughter-in-law disappeared. I like to cook and I have no education beyond the sixth grade; I don't have any degrees*" (italics mine) is in keeping with the individualistic rhetoric of many Madres' accounts.³³ Emblematic of this approach is a collection of Madres' testimonies, compiled by member Matilde Mellibovsky in 1997 under the title *Circle of Love Over Death*. The book comprises twenty-one mothers' stories, each written from the first-person point of view. The testimonies are grouped by subject ("The Children," "The Search and the Wait," "The Mothers Go to the Plaza"), yet they appear as individual narratives. The women orient themselves as individuals constructing and experiencing history. Gardella de Ackerman, mother of the disappeared Leticia Mabel Ackerman, for example, reflects, "When I think about Leticia, everything I remember is good, positive; but of course I am partial."³⁴ Notably, in Gardella's history, the story of Leticia is mediated through her mother's own memory. The mother as an individual (the *I*) becomes the subject experiencing the grief of the Dirty War and therefore prompting social change. María Ardela Gard de Antokoletz, mother of the

³³ Sternbach and Brizeno, "Interview with Hebe de Bonafini," 16.

³⁴ Matilde Mellibovsky, *Circle of Love Over Death*, trans. Maria Proser and Matthew Proser (Curbstone Press, 1997), 8.

disappeared Daniel Victor Antokoletz, provides a particularly striking example of this first-person narrative, locating as the beginning of her testimony her own childhood. She writes, “I was born in San Nicolás de los Arroyos in the bosom of a family deeply rooted in the city. I grew up surrounded by love and devotion; I was protected and educated.”³⁵ In María’s testimony, the self again becomes an essential focus of the Madres and the starting point for their efforts. This individualistic rhetoric in both interviews and testimonies aligns with the isolationist intent of the Madres – one witnessed in the creative production of the movement.

The isolation of the movement manifested partly as gender separatism – that is, the exclusion of men in both the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo. The organizations retained their gender separatist approach for reasons personal and political. Hebe de Bonafini addresses men’s exclusion explicitly in her 1986 interview, recalling that “there were a lot of times when the fathers wanted to have a say in what we were doing, but even then we maintained our distance.”³⁶ She contends, “we’re stronger than men,” citing the fact that “in those early years, more fathers than mothers died from the desperation” of their children’s disappearances.³⁷ Although murky in its historical credibility – how exactly Bonafini determines that a parent “died from the desperation” remains unclear – this quote reflects an ethos of gender separatism in the movement. The Madres relied on rhetoric of their own strength relative to their husbands, in part as emotional fodder for their protest. Pragmatically, the exclusion of men also functioned to protect the Madres from political retaliation. Scholars such as Navarro have explained that “The junta did not recognize the political nature of the Madres’ actions”³⁸ because “mothers were not perceived as political subjects” and their “actions were therefore politically invisible.”³⁹ She reflects that the government’s inability to perceive a women-only organization as a political threat “was

³⁵ Ibid., 15.

³⁶ Sternbach and Brizenó, “Interview with Hebe de Bonafini,” 19.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Navarro, “The Personal Is Political,” 204.

³⁹ Ibid., 209.

crucial for the evolution of the movement because it gave the women the necessary time to strengthen their resolve, contact other mothers, establish an informal organization, and engage in other activities.”⁴⁰ Gender separatism therefore operated as a political tactic as well as an interpersonal preference. Isolation from men can be identified as one facet of the Madres’ broader isolationist approach to social change.

Isolation from men appears, throughout the iconography of the Madres’ work, in a focus on the female body. Interviews and testimonies provided by the Madres share an interest in the maternal body as a site of political mobilization. Several mothers refer to pregnancy, either metaphorically or literally, thereby positioning their struggle within the female body. Lola Weinschelbaum de Rubino, one of the twenty-one Madres given voice in Mellibovsky’s book, exemplifies this focus on pregnancy. She begins the story of her disappeared daughter Raquel del Carmen as “an unexpected pregnancy,” thus centering her bodily experience of motherhood.⁴¹ In the same way, Poeme Gardella de Akerman describes her daughter Leticia as having been “breast-fed on the craving for justice.”⁴² Again, in this testimony, the mother’s body – the breast-feeding body – becomes a living participant in the story of the disappeared child. Hebe de Bonafini’s interview galvanizes similar language of pregnancy to interpret and express the experience of the Madres. Bonafini at one point claims that her children “gave birth to” her⁴³ and makes the poignant comment, “For me, when a mother’s children have been taken from her, she remains pregnant forever.”⁴⁴ This language highlighted the mothers’ bodily experience of rearing and losing the desaparecidos. In doing so, the rhetoric inherently isolated men from the Madres’ project. In an overturning of histories of reproductive rights abuses, the female body became the site of political focus and inspiration – an inspiration that fathers could not access.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 205.

⁴¹ Mellibovsky, *Circle of Love Over Death*, 11.

⁴² Ibid., 9.

⁴³ Sternbach and Brizeno, “Interview with Hebe de Bonafini,” 17.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 19.

Pregnant women also inhabit a central place in the visual iconography produced by the Madres. Figure 1 (shown below), depicting the front page of the tenth bulletin published by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, visually captures the individual female body as a locus of power. Figures 2 through 5 (also below) all depict pregnant silhouettes plastered on walls in Buenos Aires during the early 1980s. The pregnant women can be identified as associated with the Madres' movement by virtue either of written reference to desaparecidos in the images or the shape of the pañuelo – the handkerchief worn by the Madres as they march-around their heads.⁴⁵ Figure 3, for example, identifies the pregnant silhouette as “María José Rapela de Mangone, desaparecida julio 1977” (“disappeared July 1977”).⁴⁶ Figure 5, in addition to marking its subject with the pañuelo, labels the desaparecida as “Gabriela Gariquiborde de Repeur” who was six months pregnant (“embarazada de 6 meses”) and disappeared on September 30, 1976.⁴⁷ That the pregnant women in all four of these posters stand alone (figures 2 and 3 show posters positioned beside one another, but the silhouettes remain in individual frames) reinforces the association between the female pregnant body and isolation in the Madres' movement; the female body was an icon which divided the Madres' work from Argentine men.

⁴⁵ Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 181.

⁴⁶ Daniel García, “Dos siluetas de una pareja de desaparecidos permanecen pegadas en las inmediaciones de Plaza de Mayo,” *Colección Gráfica Política: Archivo de Artistas Juan Carlos Romero 1930-2017*, Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1983
[https://archivosenuso.org/search/node/embarazada#viewer=/viewer/590&js=.](https://archivosenuso.org/search/node/embarazada#viewer=/viewer/590&js=)

⁴⁷ Edward Shaw, “Primer Siluetazo, silueta de una mujer embarazada sobre muro urbano,” *Colección Gráfica Política: Archivo de Artistas Juan Carlos Romero 1930-2017*, Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1983,
[https://archivosenuso.org/search/node/embarazada#viewer=/viewer/650&js=.](https://archivosenuso.org/search/node/embarazada#viewer=/viewer/650&js=)

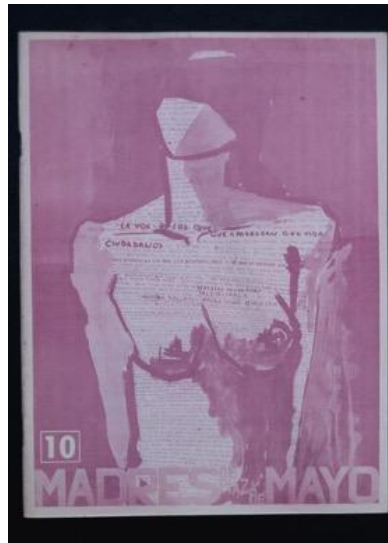


Figure 1. *Portada del décimo Boletín de Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 1982*



Figure 2. *“Embarazada,” afiche en una calle de Buenos Aires, undated*



Figure 3. *Dos siluetas de una pareja de desaparecidos permanecen pegadas en las inmediaciones de Plaza de Mayo, 1983*



Figure 4. *Primer Siluetazo, silueta de mujer embarazada pidiendo Aparición con vida, 1983*



Figure 5. *Primer Siluetazo, silueta de una mujer embarazada sobre muro urbano, 1983*

The Madres' dislocation from Catholic iconography provides another instance of their isolationist approach to social change. Although many Madres were Catholic, the movement found little solace in the Catholic church.⁴⁸ Bishops and priests alike condemned the Madres for lacking faith in god, declaring that the answer to their struggle lay in prayer rather than mobilization.⁴⁹ The Madres were particularly resistant to Catholic gender constructs like Marianismo – a movement based in comparison of Catholic women to the self-sacrificing figure of the Virgin Mary. Historian Marguerite Guzman explains the Madres' rejection of this association with the Virgin Mary, writing:

In popular culture she is portrayed as a grieving woman, draped in a black mantilla and praying for the souls of her sinful menfolk to whom she is nonetheless submissive. The Mothers do not need feminist theory to understand how the traditional female role reinforces a repressive system. They have refused to mourn or weep for their children because they have concluded that such behavior helps the

⁴⁸ Navarro, "The Personal Is Political," 204.

⁴⁹ Arditti, *Searching for Life*, 61.

government dominate them by absorbing the energy that should be used for political struggle. The Mothers do not wish to be seen as grieving women – they are fighters.⁵⁰

Guzman contextualizes the Madres' rejection of Catholic iconography via a rejection of the gender roles imposed upon Argentine women by the Catholic church and the ideology of Marianismo. The Madres' repudiation of passive grieving, as an extension of their religious disaffiliation, is symbolized in the form of the white handkerchief worn about their heads. These kerchiefs, known by their Spanish name *pañuelos*, are meant to evoke the swaddling shawls of a baby. The white of the pañuelo provides a contrast from the "black mantilla" of the mourning Virgin Mary. Rather than grief, the pañuelo symbolizes strength, hope, and solidarity amongst the mothers. The shawls are often tied together into long ropes to protect young protestors from the violence of Argentine police.⁵¹ The white of the shawls and their use as mechanisms of empowerment in the face of grief provide an iconographic break from the Catholic church, further isolating the Madres' movement.

More surprising than the Madres' rejection of male participation and Catholicism was their pointed dislocation from feminist movements. Hebe de Bonafini articulates clearly in her 1986 interview, "We're not feminists."⁵² Admittedly, Bonafini's understanding of the term "feminist" must itself be defined before her position can be understood by contemporary readers. She reads feminism as a "vindication of the clitoris," reducing Argentine feminism to a frivolous request for sexual liberation.⁵³ The conditions that Bonafini advocates – equality with men and development of a "consciousness as women," do indeed resonate with contemporary feminist rhetoric.⁵⁴ Regardless of this semantic complication, however, Bonafini's words reflect a disinclination amongst the Madres to align politically with the cause of women's rights. Despite their collaboration with the National Movement of Housewives and their guest appearances on women's radio and television

⁵⁰ Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 184.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁵² Sternbach and Brizeno, "Interview with Hebe de Bonafini," 20.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

programs, the Madres have remained vocally wary of feminist movements which privilege the professional classes or attempt to extricate women from maternal identities. Guzman explains their disinterest in feminism for its own sake through a lens of intersectional struggle. She argues that “their male and female children’s political activism” – and the disappearance of those children – “is a more potent factor in their motivation than the feminists’ task of transforming views on gender.”⁵⁵ That is, for the Madres, the dismantling of patriarchal structures itself is not an ultimate goal; rather, patriarchy must be dismantled as it intersectionally produces an obstacle to the primary goal of the Madres: the recognition and return of the desaparecidos.

As a final instance of their isolationist rhetoric, the Madres and Abuelas remain staunchly isolated from Argentine political actors. Bonafini stated clearly in 1986 that the Madres’ movement had “no intention of allying with a political party.”⁵⁶ In the “Declaration of Principles and Affidavit of the Grandmothers of the Plaza De Mayo,” released in 1982, the Abuelas project the same politically unaffiliated stance. They declare themselves “[un]motivated by any political objective,” confirming, “No one has called us together, no one directs us or uses us.” They explain, rather, “We are against violence and against any type of terrorism, private or state.”⁵⁷ The Abuelas act, like the Madres, to promote their particular project and theirs in isolation. From the focus on individual Madres’ narratives to the politically unaffiliated stance of the movements, the Madres and Abuelas maintain an individualistic approach to social change in their rhetoric and iconography.

From Without: The Madres as a Collective

While individualistic iconography produced by the Madres imbues the movement with an isolationist bent, rhetoric produced about the Madres from external sources tends to frame the Madres as part of broader political structures. This collectivist understanding of

⁵⁵ Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 191.

⁵⁶ Sternbach and Brizeno, “Interview with Hebe de Bonafini,” 19.

⁵⁷ Arditti, *Searching for Life*, 61.

the Madres is evidenced partially in verbal and visual language, which posits members as a group rather than independently grieving women. Where Matilde Mellibovsky's *Circle of Love Over Death* relied on isolated testimonies, Marjorie Agosín, Chilean author and professor of Latin American literature at Wellesley College, explored the Madres together in her 1992 poetry collection *Circles of Madness*. She describes the mothers most often in the plural. She details "The kerchiefs that *they* tie" (emphasis added) in one poem.⁵⁸ In another, she writes, "*They* patiently name them, as if dealing with legends. / But *they* are *their* children and no one attends the ceremonies."⁵⁹ With this pluralistic language, Agosín reveals her own reading of the Madres as one collective rather than individual. She sees the mothers as a group of protestors, rather than women who grieve independently for individual children. In perhaps the most intriguing linguistic move, Agosín even situates herself within the Madres' point of view. She writes often in the first-person plural. "Here are our albums," she declares: "We are the mothers of the / disappeared. / We collect / their faces in these photographs / and we often talk with them / and we ask ourselves / *Who will caress / Graciela's hair? / What have they done with Andres' / little body?*"⁶⁰ Agosín's decision to position herself within the Madres' collective struggle is particularly interesting, as it reflects an impulse on the part of onlookers to identify themselves within the Madres' movement. So doing, they expand the meaning of the social struggle beyond the particular context of the desaparecidos and Argentina's Dirty War. In a sense, this is the same impulse that prompts historians like Bejarano, Navarro, and Bouvard to locate the Madres within larger feminist and democratizing social movements throughout history.

The collective perspective projected from outside the movement upon the Madres is likewise manifest in visual iconography – murals, posters, and photographs created by outside actors tend to depict the Madres in groups rather than individually. Figure 6 shows

⁵⁸ Agosín, *Circles of Madness*, 33.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

one such mural, envisioning the Madres as a crowd of marching pañuelo-clad heads.⁶¹

Figures 7 and 8 provide two photographs of the Madres marching as a collective front. Both photos depict the Madres from the exterior of the crowd, producing a gaze that looks upon the protesters – and the movement more broadly – from the outside in. In contrast to the individual pregnant women featured in so many murals from the Madres, figures 6 through 8 feature a collection of Madres, matching the pluralistic rhetoric of Agosín's poetry.



Figure 6. *Mural de apoyo a las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, undated



Figure 7. *Última marcha de Madres de Plaza de Mayo bajo la dictadura*, 1983

⁶¹ Roberto Amigo, "Mural de apoyo a las Madres de Plaza de Mayo," *Colección Grafica Politica: Archivo de Artistas Juan Carlos Romero 1930–2017*, Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Buenos Aires, undated, <https://archivosenuso.org/search/node/madres?page=1#viewer=/viewer/482&js=>.



Figure 8. *Circles of Madness* frontispiece, undated, published 1992

This collectivist understanding of the Madres promulgated from outside the movement became a means to political solidarity with other causes. One particularly interesting poster, published for the *Día Internacional de la Mujer* in 1984, exemplifies the common practice of situating the Madres as a collective in solidarity with larger political struggles. The poster, depicted in figure 9, is titled *Madres de la Plaza, los artistas las abrazan* (in English, “Mothers of the plaza, artists embrace them”). This title identifies the poster as a document of not only the Madres themselves, but Argentine artists’ reactions to their movement. The poster contains three sketches of the mothers holding photos of their children, drawn by modern Argentine artist Carlos Alonso. An extensive caption accompanies the sketches, calling viewers to march at the Plaza de Mayo in celebration of International Women’s Day on March 8th.⁶² The caption

⁶² “Madres de la Plaza, los artistas las abrazan,” *Colección Gráfica Política: Archivo de Artistas Juan Carlos Romero 1930–2017*, Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1984, <https://archivosenuso.org/search/node/madres#viewer=/viewer/1824&js=>.



Figure 9. *Madres de la Plaza, los artistas las abrazan*, 1984

embodies the collectivist language emblematic of external representations of the Madres. Like Marjorie Agosín's *Circles of Madness*, the poster's text employs the second-person plural. With declarations such as, "*Sentimos* que el arte es un camino para la más profunda identificación con la vida" ("*We* feel that art is a path for the most profound identification with life") and "*vemos* en la mujer la esperanza activa de la paz y de la nueva vida" ("*We* see in women active hope for peace and new life"), the poster sets its authors and readers within a larger collective that looks upon and implicates the Madres (italics mine).⁶³ That the Madres are discussed not only in the plural, but in the first-person plural echoes the collectivist positioning in Agosín's poetry.

⁶³ "Madres de la Plaza, los artistas las abrazan."

The pluralizing language of the poster assumes an explicitly political valence through the association between the Madres and International Women's Day. In contrast to Hebe de Bonafini's pointed "We're not feminist," the pairing of the Madres with International Women's Day implicates their movement within a global feminist struggle.⁶⁴ The poster indeed demands that *the woman* is "la más marginada entre los marginados, la más despreciada en la hora del desprecio" ("the most marginal amongst the marginalized, the most despised in the hour of contempt").⁶⁵ This absolutizing language not only links the Madres' search for desaparecidos to the feminist political project; it declares the feminist project to be the ultimate political motive – women being the "most marginal" and "most despised" of peoples – towards which the Madres work. The poster ultimately calls upon Argentines to march not for the desaparecidos, but for all women everywhere. While the Madres envisioned their demands as an intersectional struggle for individual desaparecidos, in which gender formed one obstacle, the poster repositions gender as the center point of the movement.⁶⁶ The poster thus exemplifies the tendency of rhetoric and iconography produced outside the Madres to discuss the movement as a collective political struggle, functioning in solidarity with broader political movements, but obfuscating the Madres' original intentions.

Conclusion

Comparison of the iconography promulgated by the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo with the iconography constructed about them from without their movements demonstrates a discrepancy in the intentions and perceptions of their project. Where the language and visuals produced *by* these movements represented the women as individuals and their project as an isolationist cause, artistic production from outsiders envisioned a collective of mothers in solidarity with various liberatory projects. The story of the Madres

⁶⁴ Sternbach and Brizeno, "Interview with Hebe de Bonafini," 20.

⁶⁵ "Madres de la Plaza, los artistas las abrazan."

⁶⁶ Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 191.

and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo in dialogue with the world around them is therefore a story of misalignment. Outside actors have co-opted the imagery of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo as symbols of feminism and democracy, often without centering the Madres' ultimate goal of political redress for Argentina's desaparecidos. They have rendered the Madres a symbol of feminism and democracy, even when the Madres themselves attempted to elide those generalizing identifiers.

The explanation for this political misalignment lies, I would argue, in the figure of the mother – a figure so universal and yet so diverse in meaning that various political actors naturally reinterpreted the Madres through their own perceptions of motherhood. To explain this interpretation, I look to one final form of art inspired by the Madres: the song *Siempre Viva*, written by Argentine singer Teresa Parodi and dedicated to Hebe de Bonafini. Released in 2023, Parodi's song does not belong to the archive of late twentieth-century Madres-inspired art on which my research relies.⁶⁷ It does, however, provide a framework for understanding the iconographic and rhetorical disconnect that has existed in depictions of Madres since our period of historical focus and persists in historical memory. Throughout her 2023 ballad, Parodi describes Hebe de Bonafini as “Madre eterna del pueblo” or “Eternal mother of the community.”⁶⁸ In the chorus, Parodi sings, “Madre eterna del pueblo / no te olvido te abrazo / no te pierdo te encuentro / no te lloro te canto” (“Eternal mother of the community / I do not forget you, I embrace you / I do not lose you, I find you / I do not cry for you, I sing to you”).⁶⁹ With these lyrics, Parodi claims Hebe de Bonafini as a universal mother – one of the *pueblo* with whom the singer can speak directly. Her words reflect the essential historical rewriting of the Madres charted in rhetorical and iconographic representations. Try as they might to promote an individual and isolated movement advocating only for the return of desaparecidos, the Madres became symbols of solidarity

⁶⁷ “Siempre Viva,” by Teresa Parodi, track 6 on *Retrato de Familia*, Sony Music Entertainment Argentina, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzvMCUvdkUw>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

movements by virtue of the audiences who perceived them and the artists – both literary and visual – who spread their ideals.

The failure of the Madres to isolate their movement in artistic and historiographic renderings hints at a broader historical truth. The movement has ultimately been defined not by the Madres or Abuelas themselves, but by the historical actors perceiving their work. The Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo has taken on a life of its own in popular and historical memory – one that transcends beyond its members' own intentions. It therefore serves as a testament to a social movement defined not only by those who promulgated it, but also by those who received its rhetoric.

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**“It Is Possible to Suffer with Dignity”: A Critical Reinterpretation of
Resistance in Etty Hillesum’s Diaries**



Etty Hillesum, 1940. The Jewish Historical Museum, The Netherlands.

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“To think that one small human heart can experience so much, oh God, so much suffering and so much love, I am so grateful to You, God, for having chosen my heart, in these times, to experience all the things it has experienced... Give me a whole life to comprehend it all.”¹

– Etty Hillesum

Esther (Etty) Hillesum was born in the Netherlands on January 15th, 1914, to Levie Hillesum and Riva Bernstein. She was the eldest of three children; her younger brothers Jacob and Micheal were also given nicknames: Jaap and Mischa. The Hillesum family moved around quite a bit in Etty’s childhood, though they settled in Deventer from July 1924 on. In grade school Etty studied Hebrew and, for a short time, attended the meetings of a Zionist youth group. After completing grade school, Etty went to Amsterdam to study law. In University, Etty was associated with left-wing and antifascist student circles, though she did not belong to any particular political party. Etty took her Bachelor’s exams in 1935 in Amsterdam, at the time living with her brother Jaap. In March of 1937 she took a room in the house of an accountant, Hans J. Wegerif at Gabriël Metsustraat 6. Hans, a widower, took Etty as his housekeeper though the two also began an affair. Etty took her master’s exams in Dutch public law on the 23rd of June and the 4th of July of 1939. The German army would invade the Netherlands in less than a year. While Etty studied Slavic languages, following in the footsteps of her father—a classical languages scholar and teacher—the war prevented her from completing her studies: though she gave private lessons until it was no longer possible. Most of Etty’s diaries were written in her room on the Gabriël Metsustraat in Amsterdam where a Stolperstein now commemorates her life.

Etty began her diary on the 8th of March 1941, one day after she began her therapy with psychoanalyst Julius Spier. Spier quickly became Etty’s friend, and soon after, her lover. In her diaries, Etty refers to him as ‘S.’ Given her initial address to him in the first entry, it is likely that Etty began the diaries in response to his recommendation. The month

¹ Etty Hillesum, *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941–1943* (William B. Eerdmans, 2002), ed. Klaas A. D. Smelik, trans. Arnold Pomerans, 514.

just before, February of 1941, the pogroms in the Netherlands had in earnest begun. The National Socialist Movement intensified their campaign, inciting antisemitic riots in Amsterdam. Following a general strike to support the Jewish population, the Germans at the end of the month, having been waiting for pretext, descended on the Jewish quarter.² When Etty began her diary, brutality against the Jewish people had quickly increased. Her existence was shaped by Nazi threat, and yet Etty's diaries deal very little with the topic of war. Her writings open with the details of her desire for Spier—whom she had met late January or early February of the same year—her captivation with him, at first, and her budding love. Etty, writing at her desk from which she could see a bush of blooming jasmine, saw a great deal of beauty in the world. As the war intensified, however, Etty's writing became more self-reflective, and while she did, still, examine the flowers, she more principally contemplated their evocations within her. Etty's diaries represent the initiation of this self-examination. They document the development of one woman's thoughts, fears, and dreams. Her diaries cannot speak for an entire Jewish collective; her writings cannot exemplify their pains. Out of a sense of moral obligation, Etty did offer herself to be a chronicler of the Holocaust,³ though rather than capture its horrors, the desolation and dismemberment, Etty concentrated on the soul: the one thing which physical violence cannot quite grasp, if we are so lucky.

Etty's diaries are rife with love and longing, forgiveness and acceptance. She is gentle and, I think, afraid, but always looking for solace and successfully finds it in writing. Between 1941 and 1943, Etty filled ten exercise books which now make up 550 typed pages of the English edition *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum*. This published, translated version of her diary is the central primary source I consulted in my writing on her. There are gaps in Etty's diaries, from July 29th of 1942, for example, until September 15th,

² Jacob Presser, *Ashes in the Wind: The Destruction of Dutch Jewry* (Wayne State University Press, 1988), 51.

³ Authors have their own preferred terms for the Final Solution or war against the Jews. Regardless of my own preferences or tendencies, in this paper I accept the term "Holocaust," being the common term in English, primarily for its use as a reciprocal tool which reveals and is revealing. For this reason, again, I will refer to the Holocaust capital H and always with the article 'the.'

as Etty was in the transition camp Westerbork during this time. Given her association with the Jewish Council, Etty was for some time *gesperrt*, meaning she was exempt from deportation to the death camps and was occasionally allowed special privileges to travel back to Amsterdam.⁴ Etty had applied to the Council in mid-July of 1942 per the recommendation of her brother Jaap after she received a call-up for Camp Westerbork.⁵ However, reflecting on this soon after, Etty wrote that her application had upset her “equilibrium” as it felt “underhanded.”⁶ Etty was accepted, initially, in an administrative position, though within a month became a social worker in Westerbork. July 1942 saw the first mass deportations of Jews from Amsterdam to the camps.⁷ The Jewish Council was forced to collaborate with deportations in the years 1942-1943, evoking some negative reactions to Etty’s involvement. Etty, however, had either foreseen these controversies or herself felt conflicted or anguished, writing on July 28th of 1942 that nothing could atone for the collaboration and that “history [would] pass judgment in due course.”⁸ On the 29th Etty went to Westerbork voluntarily. As a social worker in Westerbork, Etty saw herself as offering spiritual support to those in danger. While Etty’s role in the Council allowed her a status ‘above’ others in the camps, Etty emphasized her desire to share in what she called the *Massenschicksal*: the common fate of the Jews.

Etty’s last exercise book, number eleven, was written after spending August in Westerbork. Etty’s diaries conclude on October 13th of 1942, as she returned to the camp and remained there, by in large, until she was deported to Auschwitz.⁹ Etty, still *gesperrt*, did return to Amsterdam on a few occasions. During one of these such visits in December of 1942, Etty became ill. While Etty was home from Westerbork for this short period, her

⁴ Etty’s participation in the Jewish Council is relevant to assessing critical interpretations of her agency and innocence, though this is beyond the scope of my work in this paper.

⁵ Jan Geurt Gaarlandt, “Context, Dilemmas, and Misunderstandings During the Composition and Publication of *An Interrupted Life: Etty Hillesum’s Diary, 1941–1943*,” in *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum: Proceeding of the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, November 2008*, ed. Klaas A. D. Smelik et al. (Brill, 2010), 372.

⁶ Hillesum, *Etty*, 491 (Tuesday, 14 July [1942]).

⁷ Presser, *Ashes in the Wind*, 143.

⁸ Hillesum, *Etty*, 511 (Tuesday, 28 July [1942]).

⁹ Hillesum, *Etty*, 549 (Tuesday, 13 October [1942]).

friend Klaas Smelik and his daughter Johanna offered Etty a place to go into hiding.¹⁰ Under the floorboards of their villa was a crawl space, tall enough for a person to stand and practically impossible to find. Etty, however, refused, insisting that Klaus Smelik did not understand her and that she wanted to share the fate of her people.¹¹ Klaas Smelik Jr. became a scholar and ultimately founder of a research center in her name, later publishing on Etty in a collection of essays. In his work he writes that his father and sister had “understood that Etty Hillesum would not voluntarily go into hiding,” and “devised a plan to abduct her against her will.”¹² This was one of many plots to have Etty escape the death camps, though she consistently resisted. In this, Etty was determined. Finally, on June 5th of 1943, Etty was well enough to return to Westerbork, and went back to the camp the very next day. Etty, when she left for Westerbork, gave eight notebooks to her friend and housemate Maria Tuinzing, asking her to pass them on to another friend, Klaas Smelik, so he might be able to get the diaries published.¹³ Though there is debate surrounding whether Etty knew for certain she was going to die, evidently she believed it possible she would not return to add to the collection and to herself seek publication of her work. One month after Etty returned to Westerbork an end was put to the special status granted to personnel at the Westerbork section of the Jewish council. On September 7th, 1943 the Hillesum family was deported to Auschwitz where they were murdered.¹⁴ A Red Cross Report states that Etty died on November 30th, 1943.¹⁵ Etty was 29.

Throughout this paper I refer to Etty by first name. There is a practical aspect to this choice for use in distinguishing Etty from the other members of her family and from the

¹⁰ I will refer throughout this paper to Klaas Smelik, Etty’s friend, and his son Klaas Smelik junior, as such, though the junior Smelik writes on Etty extensively now simply as Klaas A. D. Smelik. My decision here is simply for practicality and ease of understanding.

¹¹ Klaas A. D. Smelik, “To Remember is to Act,” in *Reading Etty Hillesum in Context: Writings, Life, and Influences of a Visionary Author*, ed. Klaas A. D. Smelik et al. (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 34.

¹² Klaas A. D. Smelik, “Etty Hillesum’s Choice Not to Go Into Hiding,” in *Reading Etty Hillesum in Context: Writings, Life, and Influences of a Visionary Author*, ed. Klaas A. D. Smelik et al. (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 83.

¹³ Denise de Costa, *Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum: Inscribing Spirituality and Sexuality* (Rutgers University Press, 1998), 176.

¹⁴ Etty’s brother Jaap did survive Auschwitz but died on his way back to Holland when he was freed.

¹⁵ Jan Geurt Gaarlandt, “Introduction” in *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941–1943*, ed. Jan Geurt Gaarlandt (Pantheon Books, 1983), xiii.

“Hillesum family” collectively, whom I make occasional reference to. I admit, however, that I feel as if I know Etty. There is nearly a century between us, and yet, to read her unabridged diaries is to spend a great deal of time with her. It is to see her days pass as she writes indicating morning, noon, and night. It is to see her in love and in mourning, to see her grappling with the purpose of life and of death. It also is to see her reconcile her sense of self as an individual with her sense of herself as a Jew—something I find myself contemplating often as the fate of the Jewish people in the world again, though, as always, seems fraught. I do not believe myself to understand Etty entirely. Rather, I recognize that I likely cannot and, in some paradoxical and roundabout way, then think I know something more fundamental about her. That is, I recognize that deep separation between us and do not attempt to reach across it: something her critics and, at times, her reverents, work desperately to do. To use her last name would feel, however, too formal, as it is her inner life and emotions which most interest me as a Jewish woman just a few years her junior. What resounds most in her diaries is the salience of Etty’s self-conception, and the penetrability of her soul. Etty, in interrogating so intensely the potential of death, develops a sort of religious sensibility, addressing God often throughout her diaries and with a great familiarity, as if she finds Him most easily within her.¹⁶ “Truly, my life,” she writes, “is one long hearkening unto my self and unto others, unto God. And if I say that I hearken, it is really God who hearkens inside me.”¹⁷ In honesty, I was led to her diaries in a search for myself, and I, much like Etty, find myself nearly everywhere and easily did in her. On September 5th of 1941 Etty wrote, “perhaps I identify too much with everything I read and study.”¹⁸ Perhaps I do the same. We must, she says, defend God’s “dwelling place inside us to the last.”¹⁹ I feel myself drawn to defend her dwelling place for her, perhaps to affirm it for myself.

¹⁶ Spier introduced Etty to St. Augustine, who in his *Confessions* theorizes the self as figuratively dimensional such that it could become a house for God to reside within. Much of Etty’s discussion of her relationship to God appears in alignment with this Augustinian notion of the self.

¹⁷ Hillesum, *Etty*, 519 (Thursday, 17 September [1942]).

¹⁸ Hillesum, *Etty*, 93 (Friday, 5 September [1941]).

¹⁹ Hillesum, *Etty*, 589 (Sunday, 12 July [1942]).

Etty's diaries, when they were published, evoked quite disparate though expectedly strong reactions. These responses derive primarily from Etty's choice to go to Westerbork rather than escape or go into hiding, as well as her general willingness to suffer, and the discussions of fulfillment, even happiness, which pervade her work. Given her somewhat shocking acceptance of the "Jewish fate," Etty's diaries have often been reduced to their purely textual proverb, the reviews focusing on this particular decision and its legitimacy or ethicality. As postwar analyses of the Holocaust and the 'behavior' of its victims tended to degrade both their weakened psychological state and ostensible physical passivity, positing that the Jewish people went "like a sheep to be slaughtered," some critics recognized the potentially dangerous implications of Etty's so-called 'self-destructive' tendencies for the larger Jewish community. Though boundless evidence has since emerged of Jewish resistance to the Nazis, Hillesum's diaries are not, without close analysis, particularly useful in disproving this stereotype. While investigating her writings, one does encounter a method that Etty formulated for internal resistance, the ubiquity of the "sheep to the slaughter" narrative and the desperation to refute it led critics to denounce Etty's her compliance with this narrative, and, therefore, for abandoning the Jewish cause and colluding with antisemites postmortem. For others, Hillesum's diaries, as they demonstrated the capacity for spiritual growth and the strength of the human spirit, inversely functioned to disprove those same assertions that the Holocaust victim was mentally degraded in the face of death. In this light, Etty seemed a martyr, unmarred and unafraid—an exemplary victim, elevated above others for her compliance with ideals of heroism and salvation. Both of these perspectives, however, reduce Etty's life to her death.²⁰ To truly understand Etty's diaries, one must be able to see them as revelatory of process: sometimes more of a story than a moral, indicative of the discursive uses to which fear or victimhood may be put.

²⁰ Ria van den Brandt writes at great length on Etty's posthumous integration into the Catholic faith, see: Ria van den Brandt, "Etty Hillesum and her 'Catholic Worshipers': A Plea for a More Critical Approach to Etty Hillesum's writings" in *Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum: Proceedings of the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, November 2008* (Brill, 2010), ed. Klaas A. D. Smelik et al., 215–31.

“The Passive Activity of Genuine Suffering”

Etty, born in 1914, lived her first years of childhood in the midst of war. While the Netherlands remained neutral in the first World War, there was no one truly unaffected by it. Early in the diaries Etty recalls the war, the “rebelliousness,” the extent of “hatred, the passion, the arguments,” with a melancholy sentimentality.²¹ Considering her emotional state now facing war again, Etty admits to being “cushioned from the outside world,” and poses to herself quite candidly, “I often wonder why this war and everything connected with it afflicts me so little.” Musing on this, she offers, “perhaps because it is my second great war? I was in the thick of the first, and then relived it in all the postwar literature... To go through it a second time just won’t do.”²² Born already into a world responding to conflict, the scale of which never before seen, Etty grew and studied in its wake only to meet another. Death seeming, to her imminent, her life shadowed by the specter of war for so long, Etty refuses for her life to be reduced from its richness. Her diaries, as they chronicle her spiritual growth, represent this determination. While the diaries do not contain many explicit references to the war, Etty’s silences are themselves reflections. Still, Etty does not deny the suffering she sees around her, and neither does she dissociate from it. In fact, Etty formulates a method for integrating this suffering with all of the good she sees in the world, so that she is able to bear it. “We suffer most by playing hide and seek with suffering,” she says, by assuming ourselves able to avoid it and allowing it to sneak up and shock us.²³ Unable to find a sense of safety in the world, Etty evidently focused on her own capacity to cultivate a sense of security within herself. Quoting from André Suarès’ *Dostojevski*, Etty records and reiterates, “pain is not the site of our longing but the site of our certainty,” something which, if one accepts, they can thus maintain a degree of control over. Etty is clear that she does not believe herself to be a masochist: she does not go in search of

²¹ Hillesum, *Etty*, 181 (Sunday, 14 December [1941]).

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Hillesum, *Etty*, 183 (Monday, 15 December [1941]).

suffering, nor does she, again in the words of Suarès, “look upon pain as perfection.”²⁴ Etty, rather, sought joy, and worked tirelessly to create a life in writing where she could find it.

Early in the collected diaries, on March 17th of 1941, Etty begins to write about her rejection of a pessimistic attitude, transcribing a quote written by Spier which, she says, she would have once thought “a very nice passage to read,” but had, by this time, truly “migrated from [her] head to [her] heart.”²⁵ Two pages are missing from Etty’s diaries before the excerpt, and the context is thus unclear. However, the quote from the diary is inserted as such, shown in full:

Being angry and dissatisfied is being unproductive; to suffer genuinely is being productive because our dissatisfaction, our anger, reflect active passivity while genuine suffering reflects passive activity. The active passivity of dissatisfaction involves resistance, rebellion against what is unalterable and so paralyzes man’s other powers. The passive activity of genuine suffering involves bearing and accepting what is inalterable and this releases new powers.²⁶

Offering the concepts “active passivity” and “passive activity,” Hillesum proclaims to practice, or at least to attempt always to practice, the latter. This passive activity was crucially characterized by an internal and preservationist method of resistance which involves an acceptance of that which cannot be changed and a mobilization of what she could control—which figured to be her spirituality and her ‘self’: the bounds of which were mutable as she derived personal and spiritual fulfillment from giving herself over to others in her romantic, sexual, familial, and communal relationships. Crucially, this concept, of “passive activity,” consistent with Etty’s continued theories of Jewish resistance throughout her diaries, relies on an acceptance of suffering and, further, a ‘mastery’ of it. The “passivity” of which Etty speaks in fact requires skill and composure. While she goes on to encourage the Jewish people as a whole to adopt this attitude, to an extent Etty recognized this to be a personal process, expressing pride in herself for her growing strength in the face of

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Hillesum, *Etty*, 27 (Monday, 17 March [1941]).

²⁶ Ibid.

struggle.²⁷ Etty, forced to contend with death, discerned for herself a method not to be destroyed by it while she still lived.

Etty mobilized the concept of “passive activity” as she later went voluntarily to Westerbork, and then again when she refused to go into hiding. Evidently there were people in Etty’s life who both feared her passing and did not understand her choice. In July of 1942, Etty responds to the criticism she received, stating,

Many accuse me of indifference and passivity when I refuse to go into hiding; they say that I have given up. They say everyone who can must try to stay out of their clutches, it’s our bounden duty to try. But that argument is specious... And the funny thing is, I don’t feel I’m in their clutches anyway, whether I stay or am sent away... I don’t feel in anybody’s clutches; I feel safe in God’s arms... I may face cruelty and deprivation the likes of which I cannot imagine even in my wildest fantasies. Yet all this is as nothing to the immeasurable expanse of my faith in God and my inner receptiveness... and my acceptance is not indifference or helplessness.²⁸

While Etty understood that others perceived her to be passive, indifferent, or despondent, she clarifies that she doesn’t feel this way at all. Further, Etty expresses that she does not feel that she is, or even would be, in the clutches of the army if she were in the camps given her attention to the preservation of her spiritual self and her relationship to God. Soon before Etty voluntarily left for Westerbork she wrote, “we must help You [God] and defend Your dwelling place inside us to the last... There are those who want to put their bodies in safekeeping but who are nothing more now than a shelter for a thousand fears and bitter feelings.”²⁹ For Etty, it would be worse to lose an inner sense of herself, and therein lose the residence for God within her, than to experience physical “cruelty and deprivation.” Etty aspired to maintain this spiritual freedom through it all, writing that, no matter how much cruelty they inflict, the Nazis “forget that no one is in their clutches who is in [God’s] arms.”³⁰ Further, Etty reveals that to suffer is not to be degraded. “Suffering,” she says, “is not beneath human dignity. I mean: it is possible to suffer with dignity and without.”³¹ Etty, though she may be willing to suffer, does resist attacks on her dignity and her humanity.

²⁷ Hillesum, *Etty*, 37 (Saturday, 20 March [1942]).

²⁸ Hillesum, *Etty*, 487 (Saturday, 11 July [1942]).

²⁹ Hillesum, *Etty*, 489 (Sunday, 12 July [1942]).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Hillesum, *Etty*, 459 (Thursday, 2 July [1942]).

Etty makes clear throughout the diaries, however, that she does not want to die. In fact, she articulates clearly wanting to “live through everything,” in order to serve her purpose as a chronicler.³² And yet, she has already been made acquainted with death, and feels as though, rather than running from it, she must “accept it as it comes.”³³ For Etty, death is simple. “You don’t have to have any profound thoughts on the subject,” she says, for “there death suddenly stands, having slipped simply, unmistakably and almost silently into... life.”³⁴ Having accepted that death is entwined with the fact of life, Etty moves, sometimes, towards it, out of a sense of moral necessity. On July 28th, just before Etty would, for the first time, leave Amsterdam for Westerbork, she writes that she is, still, constrained by her human desires, “tied by a thousand threads to everything [she] treasure[s]” at home. However, Etty proclaims, “each moment I move forward from my dependence on external props and draw closer inwardly to those whom I cannot be separated from no matter how far apart we happen to be.”³⁵ Etty’s turn to her interiority allows her to preserve these bonds and these memories, to “store everything inside,” so as to be able to take these things with her when she goes.³⁶ Though Etty’s attachments are strong, she feels such a necessity to package these things to be able to be present in Westerbork for the people there. Etty writes of Hans, of her “poor little parents,” and of Spier, whom she recalls saying, “you must not go from me, you must stay.”³⁷ And yet, Etty, preparing to assume her role at Westerbork, resolves that she must be prepared for her “project,” writing as if a reminder to herself, “wherever you happen to find yourself, be there with your whole heart. If your heart is elsewhere, you won’t give enough to the community in which you happen to be.” Etty prepared herself for the possibility of death and retired from “guessing about the duration of the war,” so as to be able to be present with the people whose pain she shared: to be able to soothe them, and herself, whatever the outcome.³⁸ Though she did not resist death, in this

³² Hillesum, *Etty*, 508-9 (Tuesday, 28 July [1942]).

³³ Hillesum, *Etty*, 184 (Monday, 15 December [1941]).

³⁴ Hillesum, *Etty*, 464 (Friday, 3 July [1942]).

³⁵ Hillesum, *Etty*, 486 (Saturday, 11 July [1942]).

³⁶ Hillesum, *Etty*, 508-59 (Tuesday, 28 July [1942]).

³⁷ Hillesum, *Etty*, 508 (Wednesday, 27 July [1942]).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

sense she is able to resist the dehumanizing and demoralizing effects of Nazi rule. Just as Etty voluntarily goes to Westerbork in the hopes of providing support to the Jewish people in suffering, Etty's later choice not to go into hiding appears principally related to her consciousness of a transport/deportation quota. Almost as soon as Etty begins writing on her choice to share in the *Massenschicksal* of the Jews, she expresses concern that evading orders for her transport would only result in another innocent Jew going in her place.³⁹ Further, seemingly anticipating survivor's guilt, Etty writes, "I don't think I would feel happy if I were exempted from what so many others have to suffer." While she reveals that many people have told her she "has a duty to go into hiding," because she has "so much to give," Etty insists that "it is sheer arrogance to think oneself too good to share the fate of the masses."⁴⁰ Etty, having readied herself to bear suffering, opens herself to it so as to be with her people, to be with her God. "I must try to live a good and faithful life," she wrote, until "my last breath: so that those who come after me do not have to start all over again."⁴¹

Etty the Shepherd: An unceasing effort to herd together her thoughts

On the 6th of July, 1942, when the destruction of the Jews, to Etty, seems imminent, she muses on the fate of the Jewish people. "Death," she says, even when "gloom and abominations are its trappings... is a gentle slipping away."⁴² Though Etty did not desire death, she did not fear it. A potential release from the looming threat from which she saw no moral escape, death would be gentle, that is, compared to what else she saw herself set to lose. The worst thing, she wrote, "will be when I am no longer allowed pencil and paper to clarify my thoughts—they are absolutely indispensable to me, for without them I shall fall apart and be utterly destroyed."⁴³ Writing was Etty's oasis, the place where she most readily confronted her deepest fears, her truest feelings. However, aware of herself living through

³⁹ Hillesum, *Etty*, 484 (Friday, 10 July [1942]).

⁴⁰ Hillesum, *Etty*, 487 (Saturday, 11 July [1942]).

⁴¹ Hillesum, *Etty*, 462 (Friday, 3 July [1942]).

⁴² Hillesum, *Etty*, 476 (Monday, 6 July [1942]).

⁴³ Ibid.

the destruction of the Jewish people, Etty also hoped to assume the responsibility of chronicler, preserving for others the methods she used to preserve her sense of dignity and self.⁴⁴ When Etty went to Westerbork she had asked for her diaries to be brought to a publisher. Knowing that she might die, Etty hoped for something to live on. Her diaries represent a continuation of a life, a life interrupted, though not a life unlived. Etty could not edit these texts, or decide exactly what she would have liked for us to see. Still, as if communicating to an audience, often speaking in the third person to herself as if reading from another perspective, Etty expresses regular frustration at her inability to express her emotions to the fullest extent. Perhaps, as writing was a passion of hers and a fundamental outlet, Etty was frustrated by her inability to translate into writing her feelings as a matter of craft. I would think, however, that Etty wanted her diaries to be read, and wanted to be understood.

Though Etty often struggled to sufficiently express her feelings in writing, Etty is ever persistent and does not suppress herself in this effort. Thus, in the diaries themselves, however, Etty herself cautions against universalizing her perspectives and assigning to others her unique experience. In writing of her reconciliation of and ability to accept both good and evil, Etty writes “sorrow and joy...the jasmine behind the house... the unspeakable horrors – it is all as one in me, and I accept it all as one mighty whole and begin to grasp it better, if only for myself.”⁴⁵ Etty was evidently aware that her experience was not universal: that her acceptance of the “sorrow and joy” all as one may have been for herself only.

Though subtly, throughout the diaries Etty acknowledges the interiority of her growth and the individuation of her experiences. For fear of being misunderstood she also tends to preface her more controversial statements, explaining that, as much peace and clarity she senses in herself, in communicating “on paper” she often will “make a mess of it.”⁴⁶ In other

⁴⁴ Etty later in the diaries, that is, when she is going to Westerbork, writes that she is determined to serve as a chronicler, as the “thinking heart of the barracks.” These entries, however, come soon before Etty went to Westerbork and then was deported to Auschwitz. It does not seem that Etty believed her earlier entries to be “chronicling,” so to speak, and it is unknowable whether Etty believed herself to have, in fact, fulfilled what she refers to as her “purpose” in these diaries.

⁴⁵ Hillesum, *Etty*, 461 (Friday, 2 July [1942]).

⁴⁶ Hillesum, *Etty*, 152 (Sunday, 23 November [1941]).

cases, she explains that it is a “struggle to wrest some form out of the chaos inside, which I am not yet ready to tackle.”⁴⁷ Etty, in writing every day, often introduces ideas she is not yet certain of how to articulate. In reading the diaries one can observe the development of a concept as Etty writes something one week, and then, incorporating similar phrases, presents a developed and fulfilled argument later on. Etty’s mind, as such, was sometimes estranged from her writing, the page not quite capturing the sentiments inside. The jasmine had always been behind Etty’s house, always as vivid and beautiful. “That jasmine,” she says, “words fail me when it comes to that jasmine. It has been there a long time, but only now are words beginning to fail me about it.”⁴⁸ Faced with the genocide of her people, how could she write of the beauty of jasmine? And how could her soul survive if she did not?

In beginning her diaries, Etty had reservations. In her second entry, Etty discusses the “sense of shame” she felt “allowing things to pour out” from her; though she asserts she “must do” this in order to give her life “satisfactory purpose.”⁴⁹ Thus, though she later assumes the role of “chronicler,” determined to document the complexities of the moment in which she wrote, from her first entry to the very last, Etty explains that the diaries are fundamental for her personal and spiritual growth, and crucially, for her survival. Thus, Etty acknowledges the diaries’ “melodrama,” as she herself calls it, and the almost compulsive internal analysis of every feeling and thought. However, Etty herself acknowledges in the very first pages a dissonance between her literary skill or coherence in writing and her internal emotional turmoil. She writes on the very first page: “at times I am nothing more or less than a miserable, frightened creature, despite the clarity with which I can express myself.”⁵⁰ Etty, always remarkably articulate, may have been less sure of herself than excerpts have her seem. Though she does not express any notable degree of doubt in her own perceptions, she does acknowledge that her writing represents her own internal processes and also an evolution: meaning that her perspectives were open to change. Etty, embarking

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Hillesum, *Etty*, 459 (Wednesday, 1 July [1942]).

⁴⁹ Hillesum, *Etty*, 4 (Sunday, 9 March [1941]).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

with Spier on a journey of psychoanalysis, appears to be untangling the “tightly wound ball of twine” which “binds” her, often attempting primarily to discern her thoughts for herself before communicating to an audience.⁵¹ This activity is what sustained her, and what offered her hope through it all. Etty’s diaries are, therefore, ambiguous at times, complex, and even contradictory. This opacity must be preserved: in it is her humanity.

Etty most often mentions the dissonance between her expressions and her inner sense when discussing her will to share in the common fate. Etty, given that she received criticism also from her own close friends regarding this desire, contemplated these critiques throughout her diaries, and often expressed frustration in her inability to have others understand. In July of 1942 she wrote: “When I tell others, fleeing or hiding is pointless, there is no escape, so let's just do what we can for others, it sounds too much like defeatism, like something I don't mean at all. I cannot find the right words either for that radiant feeling inside me, which encompasses but is untouched by all the suffering and all the violence.”⁵² Etty was aware both that her writings on the Jewish fate appeared defeatist, and that the “radiant feeling” within her was difficult to encapsulate and to describe. She was certainly correct in insighting that her work would sometimes appear to be something she didn't mean at all. Etty, knowing this, worked to clarify her meanings constantly, and was also quite hard on herself. In late July of 1942, Etty writes that she has begun to read some of her older entries, and scolds herself for writing such “schoolgirlish nonsense,” referring, most likely, to the extensive entries detailing her near obsessive desire for Spier which she later felt cool. “I've felt,” she admits, “like tearing everything up.” She resolves, however, to keep these entries, writing, “I thought I ought to keep it... as a means of getting in touch with my old self later on.”⁵³ Reading Etty's diaries means coming into contact with her deepest secrets and sometimes, her regrets. And still, these have been offered to us. Etty, discussing her process of writing, offers this:

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Hillesum, *Etty*, 483 (Friday, 10 July [1942]).

⁵³ Hillesum, *Etty*, 507 (Monday, 27 July [1942]).

Yesterday afternoon I knelt down... and tried to entice my thoughts and feelings which were raging before and all around me like wild hordes/herds, back into the confines of my innermost inner self... Herding together the disorderly flock of your thoughts, emotions, sensations, experiences, reactions—please let me for once hit upon the right word that expresses it all. Like the good shepherd.”⁵⁴

Herding together her feelings and thoughts, desperate to be the “good shepherd” and courageous enough to share with us all this from the confines of her innermost self, Etty is begging us to be gentle with her.

“Still not ripe”: Etty’s Path to Publication

Soon after the war had ended, Maria Tunizing contacted Klaas Smelik. She had for him a bundle of Etty’s diaries along with a series of letters she had sent from Westerbork. Smelik could not decipher Etty’s sprawling handwriting which filled page after page, as if nothing could stand not to be said. Smelik’s daughter, Johanna, however, could read Etty’s writing and transcribed a sample to send to publishers.⁵⁵ While Smelik approached various publishers throughout the 1950s, he was turned down by every one of them. German author Denise de Costa writes that she investigated the letters from publishers to Klaas Smelik, which are held in the multimedia center of the Jewish Historical Museum (along with much of Hillesum’s legacy including her diaries, pictures, and letters to, from, and regarding Hillesum—such as these regarding publication of her diary) though the letters gave no indication to the reason for rejection.⁵⁶ Costa, however, spoke to Smelik junior, whose father disclosed to him that “publishers were not interested in Hillesum’s work because it did not contain enough horror.”⁵⁷ In a 2018 anthology of essays on Etty, *Reading Etty Hillesum in Context*, Smelik junior elaborates that publishers rejected the diaries because they were too philosophical. “The war,” he says, “was being commemorated,” not analyzed.⁵⁸ Etty’s suffering, as she often intellectualized her pain and her struggle, could not always clearly be seen. “People wanted to hear about atrocities,” he said. They did not want “an appeal for love

⁵⁴ Hillesum, *Etty*, 194 (Saturday, 20 December [1941]).

⁵⁵ Smelik, “To Remember is to Act,” 36.

⁵⁶ de Costa, *Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum*, 254.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Smelik, “To Remember is to Act,” 36.

and reconciliation.”⁵⁹ Smelik junior recalls the last time his father sought publication of the diaries, in 1965. The time, he says, was “still not ripe,” as if it were time which needed to be prepared to receive Etty.⁶⁰

In the years immediately following the Holocaust, local populations infamously treated returning Jews quite poorly, marginalizing the extent of Jewish death.⁶¹ Although Jewish survivors themselves gathered to understand and to document the tragedy of the Holocaust, the European public discourses primarily addressed resistance to National Socialism as an abstract political concept without mentioning or taking into account the distinct victimization of the Jewish people.⁶² Many early Holocaust texts focused on the extent of destruction, investigating how the German army was capable of committing such crimes, while Etty’s diaries were entirely concentrated on the protection of Jewish personhood and the safety of the human spirit in the midst of war. The emphasis on investigating abstractions of facism rather than its effects meant that generally, Holocaust survivors were not entrusted with the objectivity which would have verified their accounts, and attention was directed away from the victim to the perpetrator. In the immediate postwar period survivors thus undertook a project which was primarily self reflective. Demeaned in the public sphere, they built networks amongst themselves. Laura Jockusch, in *Collect and Record!* reveals that these early chroniclers, as they worked to document their traumatic experiences, in fact “touched upon some of the major phenomenological and methodological problems that have preoccupied Holocaust researchers until the present day.”⁶³ These chroniclers crucially introduced the use of ego-documents from Jewish victims, such as diaries, along with letters, memoirs, and autobiographies. Although these early survivor accounts were able to integrate more complicated frameworks for thinking through

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 37.

⁶¹ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (Penguin Press, 2005), 23.

⁶² Carolyn J. Dean, *The Moral Witness: Trials and Testimony after Genocide* (Cornell University Press, 2019), 92. The Jewish postwar project to document the Holocaust in the immediate postwar is described at length by Laura Jockusch, see: Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record!: Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁶³ Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record!: Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 9.

the concept of resistance—which would make way for Etty’s diaries—their insights would not enter the academic study of the Holocaust until the 1980s and 90s.⁶⁴ Thus, despite these complex interrogations, survivors active in official “historical commissions and documentation centers were aware... that such sources had value for historical research only if collected in a critical mass; moreover, such testimonies,” would be “read against each other,” and evaluated for consistency with one another and perpetrator documents.⁶⁵ Analyzing the early outpouring of Holocaust survivor testimonies, Australian researcher Margaret Taft notes that early testimonies tended to express “personal grief and anguish within an all encompassing metanarrative, one that directly addressed the great crime committed against them all.”⁶⁶ The experiences of individuals, she asserts, had to co-exist with those of the collective in a sort of “double-consciousness,” where little divided personal accounts from the public record.⁶⁷ Thus, in legitimizing the Holocaust as a crime against the collective of Jewish people, personal narratives were subsumed and sometimes obscured.

There were, of course, texts from Holocaust victims which were being published in the postwar period, though they were typically accepted only if they did not destabilize this metanarrative. In 1947 *The Diary of a Young Girl*, commonly referred to as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, was published. Anne Frank, like Etty, also lived in Amsterdam and, though many years younger, she similarly had literary aspirations and emphasized the importance of maintaining a kind and gentle spirit. Both diaries, as well, engage the Holocaust obliquely, focusing primarily on personal growth and development. Anne Franks’s diaries were crucially written while she was in hiding, her personal development foregrounded by the fact of her confinement. When the diaries were published, her father approved deletions of passages regarding her menstruation and sexuality; though these were fundamental to her

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 9–10.

⁶⁶ Margaret Taft, *From Victim to Survivor: The Emergence and Development of the Holocaust Witness, 1941–1949* (Valentine Mitchell, 2013) 72.

⁶⁷ Taft, *From Victim to Survivor*, 72.

coming of age, publishers had rejected the diaries for their sexual references.⁶⁸ Anne Frank's diaries had to be sterilized for publication. Her sexuality may have threatened her apparent 'repression,' by disturbing her identity as an adolescent which, consequently, renders her subagential: naive, not yet developed, and therefore innocent, always. Etty, however, was not a girl but a woman. Etty's refusal to go into hiding appeared, given her womanhood and maturity, a lucid rejection of physical resistance. Etty's diaries directly express a sense of agency, an assertion over the conditions of her death and of her life. The sexual content of Etty's diaries further crystallize this assertion as Etty defends for herself the centrality of love in her life even amidst tragedy. Until the emergence of women's history as an academic discipline in the mid-1970s, women's experiences were almost entirely neglected in Holocaust scholarship, and even more repressed were women's experiences with sexuality under Nazism.⁶⁹ Scholar Joan Ringelheim writes that sexual analyses of life during the Holocaust "must integrate the overwhelming presence of death and must grapple with the awesome power that German authorities had over all people marked for annihilation."⁷⁰ Though potentially uncomfortable, none of these sexual expressions can be removed from their context. Just as Etty writes of the jasmine bush blooming just beyond her windowsill, though shadowed always with the genocide of the Jews, sexual expressions during the Holocaust confess that no pleasures are abstract. For Etty, the threat of death commingled with, and perhaps enhanced, her desire. Read together without sympathy for Etty's (perhaps impossible) endeavor to reconcile the world's beauties with its horrors, the presence of both on one page appears scandalous. Childhood, situated within a context removed entirely from the specter of sex, made the victimization of the innocent legible by allowing for retention of one's purity. However, the bulk of Etty's diaries, if not always explicitly sexual, are often erotic, with regular reference to her relationship with Spier. When they were

⁶⁸ Jeffrey Shandler, "From Diary to Book: Text, Object, Structure" in *Anne Frank Unbound: Media, Imagination, Memory*, eds. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jeffrey Shandler (Indiana University Press, 2012), 31.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth D. Heineman, "Sexuality and Nazism: The Doubly Unspeakable?" in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (Berghahn Books: 2005), 23.

⁷⁰ Heineman, "Sexuality and Nazism: The Doubly Unspeakable?" 58.

eventually published, though it would have been near impossible to remove these passages, the sexual content within the diaries was extensively cut. For Etty's diaries to be published the time would have to ripen, and she, like Anne Frank, would have to be confined.

In the 1960s, though still constrained, the voices of Jewish people were slowly being allowed into mainstream discourses. Annette Wieviorka's work, which historicizes the official invocation of survivor identity internationally, identifies the Eichmann trial in 1961 as the moment which invoked the Holocaust survivor as witness and valorized Holocaust testimony in the public and political spheres.⁷¹ After the Nuremberg trials of 1945-46—wherein the United States commuted a majority of the sentences in an effort to guarantee the support of West Germany in the Cold War—the Eichmann trial of 1961-1962, conducted in Israel, redirected attention to the particular Jewish dimensions of the Holocaust by aiming to communicate the horrors of the Holocaust to an audience as well as judge Adolf Eichmann. While both the Nuremberg and Eichmann trials utilized film and photograph, the Nuremberg trials relied largely on documentation from the Nazi state while “the Eichmann case was based heavily on both written documents and oral evidence from victims—with the testimonies providing a living immediacy and embodied charge.”⁷² Shenker notes that survivor testimony crucially provided a “charge,” capable, unlike government documents, of illuminating the personal and emotional aspects of the tragedy. The integration of these written sources as evidence transformed the role of the Holocaust victim, and thus, the Holocaust diarist: their role in the public consciousness now principally political. The Holocaust victim, finally offered a voice in the public sphere, would play an active role in attaining justice for the Jewish people.

The connotation of the Holocaust witness as representative of direct confrontation and resistance became, at this moment, absolutely crucial to contradict claims by scholars who suggested that the Jews were complicit in their own deaths and, in extreme cases, participated in or condoned their own extermination. The Eichmann trial nearly coincided

⁷¹ Annette Wieviorka, “The Witness in History,” *Poetics Today* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2006), 389.

⁷² Noah Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony* (Indiana University Press, 2015), 8.

with the publication of Bruno Bettelheim's 1963 *The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age*, which analyzed the behavior of the Jews during the Holocaust, though focused specifically on their experiences in the death camps.⁷³ Bettelheim was in the German concentration camps Dachau and Buchenwald for an approximate year total, spanning 1938 to 1939.⁷⁴ Bettelheim's first report on his time in the camps appeared in 1943, the year Etty was killed at Auschwitz. Following his liberation from the camps, Bettelheim was motivated to write a conclusive analysis of what he had experienced primarily because the "impact on the personality of prisoners" was "as yet unrecognized."⁷⁵ Bettelheim suggests in his book that, in an attempt to avoid punishment and conflict with the SS, the Jewish people resorted to "masochistic, passive-dependent, and childlike attitudes," for relieving aggressions. In doing so, he argues, the victims of the Holocaust adopted dispositions that fundamentally aligned with the Nazi objective to weaken and homogenize the Jews into "a docile mass from which no individual or group act of resistance could arise," thereby participating in their own extermination.⁷⁶

Bettelheim's thesis echoed criticism that the Jews had gone to their deaths "like sheep to the slaughter," invoking the Biblical passage Isaiah 53:7 where a servant is murdered without protestation. The term's original application to the Holocaust context was, in fact, by resistance fighter Abba Kovner from Vilna, Lithuania, who encouraged Jews to revolt against the Nazis and whose words inspired those in other ghettos to take up arms.⁷⁷ After the Holocaust, Kovner's words, in light of the massive destruction, were interpreted as a characterization of the Jews as passive, submissive, and self-destructive. Viktor Frankl brought the topic to the public with his 1946 book *Man's Search for Meaning*, which asserted that, as survival in the camps depended on one's ability to "retreat" from reality, those who

⁷³ Much of Bettelheim's work was discredited after his death due to fraudulent academic credentials and abuse of patients and students. Still, I invoke Bettelheim given his prominence at the time and, thus, his contributions to an ongoing conversation which, at the time of *Etty's* publication, would have been relevant.

⁷⁴ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age* (The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 13.

⁷⁵ Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart*, 107.

⁷⁶ Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart*, 109.

⁷⁷ Richard Middleton-Kaplan, "The Myth of Jewish Passivity" in *Jewish Resistance Against the Nazis*, ed. Patrick Henry (Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 6.

fared best in the camps were, paradoxically, “of a less hardy make-up.”⁷⁸ Frankl and Bettelheim, along with Raul Hilberg and Hannah Arendt were those among prominent voices understood to have allocated partial responsibility for the Holocaust to the Jews themselves. In the early 60s both Hilberg and Arendt, in her widely-read account of the Eichmann trial, wrote on what they observed to be a shortage of resistance, implying that the Jewish tendency for passivity was ultimately liable for the deaths of so many Jews. Though Arendt later clarified that the issue, in her eyes, was the passivity of the whole world rather than just of the Jews, according to journalist Amos Elon, “no book within living memory had elicited similar passions,” as *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and Arendt’s perspectives had already affected global perceptions of the Holocaust victim.⁷⁹ That the Jews had gone to their deaths like sheep to the slaughter became a dominant paradigm.

Extensive accounts of Jewish resistance to the Holocaust had been recorded throughout the 1940s and 50s, and books such as K. Shabbetai’s *Sheep to the Slaughter? The Myth of Cowardice* and Yuri Suhl’s *They Fought Back* emerged throughout the 1960s. Still, the tendency to blame the Jews for their own murder became pervasive, and later texts, such as George M. Kren and Leon Rappoport’s 1980 *The Holocaust and the Crisis of Human Behavior*, continued to assert that the Holocaust victim had—though unintentionally—participated in his own extermination. Expanding on Bettelheim’s analysis, Kren and Rappoport challenge the concept of innocence, implying that in retaining a marker of moral purity, the Jews condemned themselves to death. The Jewish people’s identification with victimhood, according to Kren and Rappoport, caused them to concentrate on “bending every effort toward correction” of the Nazi’s perception of Jews, thereby ignoring “what it means to be a victim”—that is, to be actively victimized, the target of violent action. Kren and Rappoport argue that, focused on the status of themselves as innocent victims, Jewish people failed to raise “the questions that require consideration if one is to survive in the role of victim,”

⁷⁸ Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Washington Square, 1984), 55–6.

⁷⁹ Amos Elon, “Introduction: The Excommunication of Hannah Arendt” in Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, ix, xix.

therefore positing that “the fact that one is innocent... works against adoption of effective action because of fear that such action may contaminate... one’s primary claim to innocence.”⁸⁰ Citing Elie A. Cohen’s 1953 *Human Behavior in the Concentration Camps*, they assert that the feeling of being innocent “weakened the energy that was essential for survival.”⁸¹ For Etty, however, accepting what she believed to be her fate, the fate of the Jewish people, did not weaken her energy. The method she developed for resistance, she asserts, in fact allows for “new powers” to be released, and prevents one from being paralyzed.⁸² Though Etty did hope to live, and hoped for the end of the war—occasionally referencing the possibility of intervention by the English army—she accepted the possibility of her death so as to best serve her people.⁸³ “I think what weakens people most,” she says, “is fear of wasting their strength.”⁸⁴

Answering these allegations of guilt and collusion and following the Eichmann trial, the Holocaust survivor undertakes a commitment to bear witness: that is, to reveal the truth. Holocaust testimony, as such, was in this moment tied up with witnessing—legitimate, honest, witnessing, at that, which accurately represented the “reality” of Holocaust to a global audience. The Eichmann trial, as it functioned not only as evidence of Eichmann’s crimes, but as legitimization of the Holocaust itself as a crime against the Jewish people, summoned the witness to serve a ‘higher’ purpose in exemplifying the suffering of the Holocaust as a whole phenomena. Witnessing the Holocaust was thus not only about one’s personal experiences in and observations from the period, but about one’s capacity to provide tangible evidence of the terror and assign culpability; the witness became, in a sense, prosecutor. This role was absolutely crucial to Holocaust survivors who were confronted with assertions that the Jewish people were themselves responsible, to some degree, for their own victimization, and many mobilized this capacity of assigning

⁸⁰ George M. Kren and Leon Rappoport, *The Holocaust and the Crisis of Human Behavior* (Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980), 75.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸² Hillesum, *Etty*, 27.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 508.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 535.

culpability in order to deflect these allegations. This capacity, after the extensive denial and marginalization of Jewish pain, became an objective for all Holocaust literature: Holocaust “witnessing,” extended as well to memoirists and diarists whose works were seen as “evidence” to be presented of the Holocaust in various contexts. The witness in the era after the Eichmann trial was expected both to convict the perpetrator and exonerate the Jew. Etty, ever gentle, slow to assign blame to others and quick to bear all the burden herself, does not fulfill this request.

After years of repeated rejection, Klaas Smelik had given up on reaching out to publishers. The diaries sat in the left hand cabinet of his desk. Smelik junior recalls the stories his father told him in his childhood about Etty’s refusal to go into hiding and of the hostile look in her eyes when he attempted to bring her to safety.⁸⁵ Though these stories had been fundamental to the Smelik family, Etty’s diaries remained unpublished. That was, until 1979 when Smelik junior met Dutch publisher J. G. Gaarlandt who mentioned to Smelik that he was interested in the philosophical questions which emerged from the war.⁸⁶ Captivated by Etty’s diaries, Gaarlandt accepted the manuscript. Gaarlandt describes the “fascination” and “shock” he felt upon reading the first few lines, wherein he was quickly convinced that he was “about to publish one of the most important documents” of his time.⁸⁷

The diaries were first deciphered and transcribed—despite Etty’s “difficult” handwriting, described in humorous depth—and Gaarlandt began what he called the “painful task” of making selections from the 400 some pages for publication.⁸⁸ Though a “faithful admirer” of Hillesum’s work, Gaarlandt worried that publishing the unabridged diaries of an unknown woman would be too great a risk as the diaries might not “receive proper notice” or end up “in used bookstores.”⁸⁹ Given his determination to “produce a book that stood a good chance of being carried by bookstores and reaching a certain number of

⁸⁵ Smelik, “To Remember is to Act,” 33.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸⁷ Gaarlandt, “Introduction,” xiii.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Gaarlandt, “Context, Dilemmas, and Misunderstandings,” 368.

readers,” Gaarlandt was drawn to capitulate.⁹⁰ Still, he declares that he strove to “convey the contents of the exercise books as carefully as possible,” primarily “taking out repetitions” and “quotations.”⁹¹ These repetitions, however, are fundamental for capturing the spirit of Etty’s diaries. In reading her unabridged diaries and recognizing these iterations, I could discern Etty’s fixations and fears. Her tireless revisions are fundamental not because they culminate in clarity, but because they illustrate her desperate attempts at expression, and confess that these attempts were not always fruitful. In removing repetitions for publication, Gaarlandt admits that he sped up her life by evading this process wherein Etty engaged in dialogue, or monologue, searching for herself.⁹² Etty’s urge “to think everything through to the extreme,” he assures, eventually “found a place” in the unabridged diaries, published in Dutch five years after *An Interrupted Life*.⁹³ However, the collected edition of Etty’s diaries primarily drew those who were already Etty’s fans. Further, though Gaarlandt does not directly address this, in the collected diaries Etty engages much more thoroughly with sexual themes than is conveyed in the original publication. This omission, I propose, was in large part to legitimize Etty’s inclusion alongside Holocaust texts of the time which emphasized a universal condition of victimhood, and of innocence. Gaarlandt, therefore, also made significant efforts to distort Etty’s attention to the war. While in the unabridged diaries, Etty directly referred to the war in about thirty places throughout, Gaarlandt admits that in composing *An Interrupted Life*, he “intentionally and deliberately included as many references to the war as possible in the diary,” making it one of his “explicit principles” to do so.⁹⁴ While *An Interrupted Life* includes far fewer of Etty’s passages on her relationship with Spier, there are an approximate equal number of direct references to the war in both the 200

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 367.

⁹³ The unabridged version was not translated into English until 2002.

⁹⁴ Gaarlandt, “Context, Dilemmas, and Misunderstandings,” 373. Comparing *An Interrupted Life* to the unabridged diaries, there are approximately the same number of references to the warWar despite the unabridged diaries being more than twice as long.

pages of *An Interrupted Life* and the near 600 pages of *Etty: Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941-1943*. Still, Gaarlandt added no words of his own.⁹⁵

The Dutch edition of *An Interrupted Life* was published by De Haan/Unieboek in 1981, with the English edition cited here following in 1983. The English edition was published by Pantheon Books, a house founded in 1942 by Kurt Wolff, who had come to the United States to escape the Holocaust, and his American wife Helen. Though by 1983 Pantheon had long been bought out by Random House and Wolff had long passed, it is notable that Pantheon published workers by thinkers such as Carl Jung, with whom Julius Spier trained, and whom Etty herself was inspired by.⁹⁶ Evidently, Pantheon was interested in the vein of psychoanalytic thought at the center of Etty's diaries and, though perhaps entirely coincidental, the history of Wolff's holocaust survival as well appears relevant in situating the Company's interest in publishing her work. In 1982, nestled between the releases of the Dutch and English editions of *An Interrupted Life*, Gaarlandt published a collection of Etty's letters under the title *The Thinking Heart of the Barracks*, which, on October 3rd, 1942, ten days before her final entry, Etty declared herself determined to be for the other inmates at Westerbork.⁹⁷

Martyr or Marred? Receptions of Etty's Diaries

A review of *An Interrupted Life* appeared in a Sunday issue of the New York Times, January 29th, 1984. The author, Terrence Des Pres, was an American Professor on the literature of the Holocaust at Colgate University and author of the 1976 book *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps*. In the preface of this book, Des Pres expresses an interest in what mattered to and for survivors, and as such, was focused on testimony as indicative of the "ways of life" which arise from living in "a world ruled by death."⁹⁸ Though he acknowledges that stories from the Holocaust "can never be told completely or often

⁹⁵ Gaarlandt, "Introduction," xiii.

⁹⁶ Hillesum, *Etty*, 673.

⁹⁷ Hillesum, *Etty*, 541.

⁹⁸ Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (Oxford University Press, 1976), v.

enough,” Des Pres admits that he observes a “terrible sameness” in the “extensive” collection of testimonial texts.⁹⁹ In his review he notes, however, that Hillesum’s diaries do not resemble what Holocaust documents are “supposed to be,” that is, “artless,” in the sense of literary flair or intricacy, and “wounded,” brimming with tragedy and with pain. Des Pres, in response to Etty’s diaries, expresses admiration for a “spirit existing at all under such brutal and inhuman conditions.”¹⁰⁰ He assures that “to ask for... some growth or deepening of the soul in that time and those places—would be unseemly, even cruel,” and yet, he celebrates the “marvelous gift” of *An Interrupted Life*, artful—“written with the interior richness and woven design of a Jamesian novel”—and certainly not wounded, as Hillesum chronicles her extensive spiritual growth (which Des Pres says he has seldom seen anywhere, much less in an account from the Holocaust) and consistently notes her sense of fulfillment, even happiness, with death at her door.¹⁰¹ According to Des Pres, the diaries “[disturb] our notions of political resistance and physical survival,” as Hillesum neither fought nor survived, but “deserves to be counted among the heroes.” In his own work Des Pres distinguishes heroes from survivors, not to degrade survivors but rather to indicate an ushering in of an age wherein death is familiar, and constantly present. It is not just the heroes who encounter death and must contemplate it. The hero “takes upon himself the condition of victimhood,” and “chooses to find consummation in death,” thereby controlling “the condition for his fulfillment.”¹⁰² The survivor, in contrast, cannot make such an absolute choice, as it is “the fight to live and not the manner of dying which matters.”¹⁰³ Des Pres’s designation of Hillesum as a hero can thus be understood not just as indicative of intrigue or reverence, but in accordance with his theory of heroism, intimately entwined with one’s encounters with or inclination towards death. That Etty voluntarily went to Westerbork is, thus, central to Des Pres’ analysis of her supposed heroism.

⁹⁹ Terrence Des Pres, “Eros, God and Auschwitz,” *The New York Times*, January 29, 1984.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Des Pres, *The Survivor*, 5, 7.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 7.

Des Pres continually focuses on Etty's resolve and fortitude. Des Pres goes on to say that "Etty's diaries complete Anne's," noting the similarities in the somewhat pacifist tendencies in the writings of both women, "except that in Etty's example there is no room for pathos," that is, Etty's diaries, in contrast with Anne's, do not evoke pity.¹⁰⁴ That which distinguishes Etty from Frank most strikingly for Des Pres is in Etty's strength of mind and certainty, which places her among the ranks of "exceptional women."¹⁰⁵ Des Pres's differentiation between the two seems to rest on Etty's womanhood, and thus, her agency, contrasted with Anne Frank's youth. Etty, as a woman, was capable of discerning meaning and making choices for herself, crucially including choices regarding the conditions of her own death. Etty had an acute awareness of the threat of death, and when death came she possessed, perhaps, a sense of control over it, having appropriated her own murder and integrated it with a sense of herself as an actualized person and as a Jew. Des Pres writes that Etty "approached her fate deliberately," and was not "haphazardly crushed." Continually applauding Etty's philosophical revelations regarding life and love, Des Pres reminds readers that these have come, "remember, in the middle of a war."¹⁰⁶ For Des Pres, Etty far exceeded expectations for Holocaust victims, offering an unexpectedly "refined" portrait of the spirit in adversity.

Following Des Pres's review of *An Interrupted Life*, Dutch scholar and journalist Henriëtte Boas wrote a reply which appeared in *The Times* on March 18th of the same year. In her response, Boas contends to correct Des Pres's supposed ignorance, asserting that he "is not sufficiently familiar with the facts—a circumstance he shares with the multitude of non-Jewish readers of the Dutch edition who caused it to become a bestseller in Holland." Des Pres was in fact born 1939 in Effingham, Illinois, and was raised Catholic; a fact which certainly goes to support Boas's conception that it is non-Jews most enamored by Etty.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Des Pres, "Eros, God and Auschwitz."

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Terrence Des Pres, "The secondary witness: an interview with Terrence Des Pres," *Edited Programs – Fortunoff Video Archive*, Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony (May 3rd, 1980), 1:19–1:47.

According to Boas, the popularity of Etty's diaries can be attributed to an uninformed, and gentle, readership, who must have been drawn to Etty's work by the particular 'falsity' it contained. She further states that while "[Etty] is admired by a large number of non-Jewish readers in Holland, many of whom even consider her as something like a saint, most Jews I know do not share this high opinion but think her self-centered and somehow artificial and untruthful."¹⁰⁸ Boas was not the only Jewish scholar unwilling to accept Etty's diaries as illustrative of a "Jewish experience" of the Holocaust. In a 2004 article, David Patterson, a historian and professor at the Ackerman Center for Holocaust Studies, writes responding to the general public's positive reception of Etty's diaries following the publication on *An Interrupted Life*, given that public opinion has regarded Etty's work as rivaling the diaries of Anne Frank. Patterson, like Boas, attributes these reactions to a primarily Christian audience, elaborating that Etty's writings were "more Christian than Jewish," noting that the publisher of the unabridged version of *An Interrupted Life* specializes in Christian books.¹⁰⁹ Alleging that Etty had little to no allegiance to or "consciousness of a Jewish community," Patterson further asserts that, given this absence, Etty's diaries do not qualify as Holocaust diaries. "The defining features of the Holocaust," according to Patterson, "are not merely historical but, more profoundly, metaphysical." Thus, texts classified within the genre of Holocaust literature must not only be located during and at the site of the genocide, but must fundamentally address "the meaning of *this* systematic murder of *these* people," as well as demonstrate a "consciousness of a Jewish community" through including "not only the consciousness of personal experience but the consciousness of communal ordeal."¹¹⁰¹¹¹

It is true that Etty seldom invoked a Jewish self-identification in her diaries. Lawrence Langer wrote of Etty that, "although she does not repudiate her Jewish identity, neither does she particularly acknowledge it," observing that "it lies uneasily on her

¹⁰⁸ Henriëtte Boas, "Voluntary Martyr?" *The New York Times*, March 18, 1984.

¹⁰⁹ David Patterson, "Through the Eyes of Those Who Were There," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18, no. 2 (2004): 285.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 279.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 277–8.

shoulders like a burden she might wish to discard.”¹¹² Certainly Etty’s spiritual growth incorporated aspects of Christianity, most notably the practice of kneeling to pray. Etty, however, identified in complete solidarity with Jewish suffering and, in that respect, always affirmed herself a Jew. Even her references to the “common fate” of the Jewish people confirm her Jewishness, and her ‘commonness’ as well, her belonging to the mass of Jewish people. Her decision not to go into hiding, also appeared to have been motivated primarily by a sense of responsibility to the Jewish collective, as Etty wrote that “everyone who seeks to save himself must surely realize that if he does not go another must take his place.”¹¹³ Etty knew that a life would be lost whether or not it was hers, and was too burdened by this knowledge to attempt at saving herself. Certainly, Etty’s comments regarding the responsibility of the Jewish people, even if not intended as such, intimated insult. On September 20th, 1942, Etty directly challenged the heroism of Jews who went into hiding, writing: “those Jews who go into hiding. They may say they’re doing it because they don’t want to work for the G., but it’s not nearly as heroic and revolutionary as that. All they’re doing is using a high-sounding excuse to dodge a fate they ought to be sharing with the rest.”¹¹⁴ Given that her own decision represented, to her, sparing another person’s life, inversely the choice to not go would have been a choice to spare oneself. Looking closely at the quote, Etty seems to primarily address those who go into hiding and then claim it to be an act of revolution, or heroism. Still, speaking of who will ultimately go to the camps, Etty says that it does not truly matter.¹¹⁵ Etty appears not to value one life above another and rather believed that one should spare a life by submitting their own, if one had the lucidity and capacity. It is not clear that she bore any true frustration with those who did hide or escape; simply, she would not have regarded these actions as heroic ones.¹¹⁶ Despite these striking passages, Patterson continues to undermine Etty’s work as an account of Holocaust,

¹¹² Lawrence L. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 70.

¹¹³ Hillesum, *Etty*, 484.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 523.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 484.

¹¹⁶ Etty at no point refers to her own action as heroism either.

remarking on the diaries' lack of "major Holocaust themes" and Etty's failure to record important events such as Nazi invasion.¹¹⁷ Patterson is, as well, correct to note that the contents of Etty's diaries do not revolve around the war, and, as Gaarlandt recalled, there were only about thirty places where Etty explicitly references its events.¹¹⁸ Gaardlandt further wrote, in 2010, that "anyone who says that Etty Hillesum reflected minimally on the wartime situation is obviously correct."¹¹⁹ And yet, while Patterson claims that there are no "Holocaust themes," within Etty's diaries one sees something absolutely central: the resilience of the human spirit through struggle.

Though Etty's diaries reflect central questions regarding Jewish experience of and responses to the Holocaust, Boas seems determined to undermine Etty's account, specifically challenging the idea that Etty achieved martyrdom. Boas, responding to Etty's decision not to go into hiding, asserts that Etty "had little inkling of what was really to happen" in the camps and maybe did not—would not—voluntarily choose to die.¹²⁰ While Boas challenges that Etty did not truly know what fate would meet her in the camps—and it is perhaps true that the full extent of Jewish suffering in the camps may not have been knowable to those outside—certainly Etty understood, by the time of her final journey to Westerbork, the Nazi's intention to annihilate the Jews. In her ninth notebook, on July 2nd of 1942, Etty wrote of the Nazis: "What is at stake is our impending destruction and annihilation, we can have no more illusions about that. They are out to destroy us completely."¹²¹ Whether Etty was truly certain of her death, however, is arbitrary, as Boas further contends that Etty in fact "made every effort" to escape being sent to Westerbork and only "acquiesced" upon the realization that the efforts were in vain.¹²² Boas insists that Etty was dishonest in her journals, contending that "she never volunteered to accompany those who were doomed,

¹¹⁷ Patterson, "Through the Eyes of Those Who Were There," 277.

¹¹⁸ Gaarlandt, "Context, Dilemmas, and Misunderstandings," 373.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Boas, "Voluntary Martyr?"

¹²¹ Hillesum, *Etty*, 461.

¹²² Boas, "Voluntary Martyr?"

despite all her remarks to the contrary in her diaries.”¹²³¹²⁴ While Etty did apply to the Jewish Council upon being called to Westerbork, she almost immediately regretted this act of self-protection and did not again avoid deportation, quickly thereafter volunteering to go to the Camp. Boas, however, writes that Etty abandoned her family in transport to Auschwitz. Boas is correct that Etty attempted to defer her transport from Westerbork so as not to go with her family, however, Etty in fact made this decision out of care for them and not disregard. Etty wrote to a friend, Maria Tuinzing, on July 10th of 1943, admitting cowardice but saying that she could not stand to see her parents in distress and as such did not want to be transported with them. Tuinzing then wrote of the departure of the Hillesum family, affirming that Etty had chosen to ride in a wagon with strangers rather than with her family, reiterating that it was because she could not bear to see them suffer. These details appeared in Etty’s letters rather than her diary, and it is fairly possible Boas had not read them by the time she wrote this reply for Des Pres. Etty’s references in her diaries to the *Massenschicksal*, however, are constant, and she never ebbs in her decision to share in it. It would require an absolute skepticism to read the diaries and still assert that Etty had not in earnest intended to allow herself to die.

Despite Etty’s extensive explanation of her decision, at no point in the article does Boas accept Etty’s assertions as truth and *then* discredit her. Rather, she maintains an almost constant sense of disbelief, seemingly certain that the writing surrounding Etty’s decision to go to Westerbork is made up of lies—for how could anyone know the true horrors of the Holocaust and wish to face them? And yet, Etty seems absolutely resolute in her conviction. Perhaps Boas believed that if Etty truly understood what she stood to face, she too would have resisted. This was likely preferable to believe, for accepting that Etty knowingly chose to die appears to affirm Bettelheim’s thesis—that the Jews were weakened to the extent not

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ These details are investigated at length by Klaas A. D. Smelik—son of Klaas A. D. Smelik Senior, the man to whom Hillesum sent her diaries before she went to die. This discussion is supported by excerpts from Etty’s diaries along with letters amongst close companions regarding her decision. See: Klaas A. D. Smelik, “Etty Hillesum’s Choice Not to Go into Hiding” in *Reading Etty Hillesum in Context: Writings, Life, and Influences of a Visionary Author*, eds. Klaas Smelik et al. (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 81–102.

only of submitting to the Nazis, but to assisting them. Boas, born three years before Etty in Amsterdam—where Etty would reside from 1932 until she would go to Westerbork—belonged to a generation of assertive Dutch Zionists who emphasized Jewish persistence and valued assertiveness. Attempting to directly counteract conceptions of the Jewish as weak and as passive, Jewish historiographers have glorified the hiding, and later escape from occupied territory, of a group of young Dutch Zionists in 1942 as epitomizing Jewish resistance.¹²⁵ Raised regarding antisemitism as an ineradicable enmity from which only Zionism could offer reprieve, “resistance” according to this sect of Zionists indicated tangible external action, as contrasted with Etty’s internal fortitude.¹²⁶ For Henriëtte Boas, a Dutch Jew working tirelessly against claims that the Jews had gone passively to their deaths, Etty appeared, perhaps, a wolf in sheep’s clothing: as presented, her published diaries claimed to offer an account of the Holocaust, but the content of the diaries seemed, to Boas, to collaborate in the degradation of Jews as submissive. Her letter, notably, which answers Des Pres, addresses a non-Jewish man who has seemingly elevated Etty above other Jewish victims of the Holocaust, victims who may have desperately tried to survive. Though I find Boas’s assertions are easily refuted in analyzing Etty’s diaries, something in her earnest appeared, to Boas, dangerous, such that she had to denigrate Etty’s agency and reduce her influence over post-Holocaust perspectives on Jewish victims.

Patterson, as well, attempted to disjoin Etty’s testimony from Holocaust literature as a whole. Noticing the individual character of her work, as well as the tone of dissociative objectivity which, for Des Pres, was inspirational and dignifying, Patterson describes Etty’s role as chronicler as “voyeuristic” and “vicarious.” Thus, Patterson distinctly isolates Etty’s experience from that of the Jewish people and asserts that she cannot, and must not, serve as “a witness.”¹²⁷ Etty’s apparent detachment was potentially resultant from the editorial process wherein her repetitions were cut and her internal conflict was therein diminished,

¹²⁵ Piet Schrijvers, “Etty Hillesum in Jewish Contexts” in *Reading Etty Hillesum in Context: Writings, Life, and Influences of a Visionary Author*, eds. Klaas A. D. Smelik, et al. (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 328.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Patterson, “Through the Eyes of Those Who Were There,” 286.

however, Patterson, writing in 2004, would have had access to Etty's unabridged diaries, which were published in English in 2002. Even when the diaries were published in their entirety, however, there were efforts to circumvent them. Continually throughout the introduction to her unabridged diaries Klaas Smelik junior writes that Etty's marks in school were "not particularly worthy of note." Again, writing about her time in University, Smelik remarks that her "academic results were not striking."¹²⁸ Gaarlandt does not make such notes in *An Interrupted Life* where he characterizes Etty as being "witty, vivid, eager," and "far ahead of her school friends."¹²⁹ Gaarlandt paints a striking portrait of Etty's life, rich with love and emotion, Etty herself passionate, altruistic, and, crucially, steady and perceptive. This all ebbs, however, as the introduction to *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941-1943* is purely discursive, describing Etty's upbringing and engaging very little with her writing's contents. Smelik's assertion of Etty's unexceptional performance, appears to be an attempt to undermine Etty's intellectualism given the negative responses to her diaries as a concession to critics such as Boas who themselves sought to undermine Etty's agency and lucidity. Patterson, unappeased, still seeks to diminish Etty's legitimacy with an accusation of voyeurism, which directly challenges her authority as a Jewish thinker. Patterson's demand that the Holocaust diarist offer testimony from a particular first-hand vantage point is conjoined with his disavowal of Etty as a "witness" as this illuminates his projection that the Holocaust diarist ought to operate, functionally, as such. According to Patterson, Etty is simply a "diarist" as opposed to a "Holocaust diarist," because she does not fill this role: she does not offer what Patterson supposes to be "the truth." While Etty describes herself as a chronicler of the Holocaust, Etty's diaries could not operate as a legible timetable of its events as the contents of her writing are not confined to the war. Though she does not adopt the lens Patterson may prefer, Etty is witness, always, through her own eyes. Her diaries chronicle her experiences and emotions, all had and felt throughout the war and bore from

¹²⁸ Klaas A. D. Smelik, "Introduction" in *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943* (William B. Eerdmans, 2002), ed. Klaas A. D. Smelik, trans. Arnold Pomerans, xii.

¹²⁹ Gaarlandt, "Introduction," x.

it. Etty's reflections are inseparable from their context, Etty writing up in her room on the Gabriël Metsustraat, occupying Nazis in the street below. Yes, Etty focused on the wealth of her life rather than what was stolen from it. Should we force Etty to bear a pain which should never have been inflicted upon her?

Patterson's rejection of Etty's diaries as 'Holocaust texts,' perhaps, can be understood as adjacent to that of the publishers who first rejected the diaries in the 1950s for their "lack of horror." In describing the ideal effect of Holocaust diaries and memoirs, Patterson says that "something in the soul of each of us... cries out," as "we realize that the tales of terror we receive are not only about them—they are about us."¹³⁰ A Holocaust diary is a Holocaust diary when it evokes this affective terror and fear. Yet, as Des Pres remarked of Etty's diaries in 1984, that in her work there is "no room for pathos." Reading them does not evoke the "stir in our bodies," or the disturbance of "our souls" which Patterson regards as so crucial to the act of consuming narratives from the Holocaust.¹³¹ Perhaps Patterson sees the objective of the Holocaust diary as inciting something akin to an Aristotelian notion of "tragic pleasure," as discussed by Hannah Arendt, "which makes one able to accept the fact that something like this war could have happened at all."¹³² "The tragic hero," in this case, the reader who engages with these texts, "becomes knowledgeable by re-experiencing what has been done in the way of suffering, and in this *pathos*, in resuffering the past, the network of individual acts is transformed into an event, a significant whole."¹³³ The reader, then, stirred to action, adopts this suffering—an act of heroism—for the purpose of addressing and tending to the harm. Patterson should like us to ingest these narratives as Eucharist: to take them in as parts of our selves, to attempt to bear the burden of what we have been entrusted.¹³⁴ For Patterson, the reader of a Holocaust diary implicates themselves, now responsible for carrying a certain weight. A failure to bear this weight, then, results in moral culpability, in

¹³⁰ Patterson, "Through the Eyes of Those Who Were There," 289.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 289.

¹³² Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 20.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Patterson, "Through the Eyes of Those Who Were There," 289.

guilt. In this sense, Patterson asks the Holocaust narrator to bear witness as if in trial; The Holocaust victim as such ought to indict, discipline, and punish: Etty certainly did not.

Des Pres also acknowledges the reader's responsibility in interacting with Holocaust texts, though, as a non-Jew, he himself assumes the role of the 'tragic hero' or, as he calls it, the 'secondary witness,' defending Etty against insults by authors such as Bettelheim for whom Etty's actions would seem to substantiate claims of Jewish regression and submission to the Nazis. On May 3rd, 1980, four years before he would write his New York Times review of *An Interrupted Life*, Terrence Des Pres was interviewed for the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony at Yale. Though Des Pres is not Jewish nor a Holocaust survivor, his interview is classified and included in the Fortunoff archive as "testimony." In the interview, titled "The Secondary Witness," he states that, "whoever listens to a witness takes on the obligation to pass the word," that is, they are a "secondary witness." Des Pres cites German-born American literary theorist Geoffrey Hartman, who drew the conclusion between secondary witnessing and complicity in a crime: here in Des Pres's words: "if you witness a crime and don't report it, you have collaborated in that crime."¹³⁵¹³⁶ Des Pres recalls his own moment of "secondary witnessing" in viewing Allied film footage from Dachau and Belsen where the soldiers dug and bulldozed the dead into pits. Des Pres says that he first saw this footage, shown at the Eichmann trials, when he was only six and did not yet know these people to be Jews; However, in encountering stories from the Holocaust, this image still haunted him. Of this footage and the bodies of the dead he says, stuttering, "I can, I can, I can always see these. They, they fall, they are falling on each other slowly, almost like a dance, and then they settle and more fall in."¹³⁷ Des Pres has seemingly been

¹³⁵ Des Pres, "The secondary witness," 0:34–0:47.

¹³⁶ Hartman would go on to write on Holocaust testimony and literature, notably in *The Longest Shadow: in The Aftermath of the Holocaust*, where he discusses the "second generation witness," referring to the child of a Holocaust witness. In a later paper "Shoah and Intellectual Witness," Hartman cites Des Pres along with Lawrence Langer as having expanded the term to "secondary witness" which generalizes the classification to all who are in touch with primary witnesses and have received their testimonies. The Fortunoff Video Archive, of which Des Pres is here a part, notably extends the capacity for secondary witnessing by allowing further generations to engage with first-hand witness testimony, even as the generation of Holocaust survivors pass away.

¹³⁷ Des Pres, "The secondary witness: an interview with Terrence Des Pres," 2:10–2:43.

emotionally affected by this footage, but also discusses being deeply touched by Holocaust testimony and the resonance of the beauty and heart ever present, even at Auschwitz where the Jews “managed to lose just less than everything.”¹³⁸ Certainly, Des Pres does adopt his place as a “secondary witness,” first impacted by distressing images of mass-death, though notably most struck by the persistence of the soul, hope, and kindness in the face of atrocity. While Des Pres applauds those who just “manage not to be crushed,” Etty’s spirit grew under the same horrific conditions. Perhaps, then, Des Pres assigns less responsibility to the primary witness as such, and more to the secondary witness who must carry this burden of knowing. Raised Catholic and, thus, an “outsider,” Des Pres may represent someone who has been called, or necessitated, to assume the role of the tragic hero, as he willingly bears the responsibility of carrying on advocacy and education for the Jews.

In his Fortunoff video archive interview, Des Pres does specifically reference Bruno Bettelheim’s *The Informed Heart*, and accuses him of denigrating survivors, noting in particular his assertion that the Jewish people regressed to infantile behavior or only survived by collaborating with the SS. These arguments, Des Pres says, did not align with his own interaction with Holocaust testimony.¹³⁹ Though by the time Des Pres encountered Bettelheim’s work he had not himself met a Holocaust survivor nor yet undertaken his 1976 scholarly project interrogating the complexities of survivor identity, he marks this dissonance—between Bettelheim’s assertions and his own “feeling,” he calls it, or instinct—as a major turning point in his own scholarship.¹⁴⁰ In short, Des Pres followed a particular instinct to disprove Bettelheim’s account of Jewish people in the camps because it appeared to him degrading. Des Pres’ work can be seen, largely, as a defense against these insults. Des Pres, already seeking to challenge Bettelheim’s derogation of Holocaust victims, found, despite the fact that she did not physically resist the Nazi’s commands, ample evidence of mental fortitude and internal resistance in Etty’s diaries. His review of Etty’s diaries, though

¹³⁸ Ibid., 7:25–7:56.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 8:58.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

noble, must be situated within this larger tendency as, in seeking to defend her, he has also made an exception of her, and to an extent elevated her above the ‘average’ Holocaust victim; which Boas may reasonably take issue with, though her criticism is misguided in being directed towards Etty rather than Des Pres. Though, perhaps, it could have been offered gently. Des Pres and Boas both grapple with Etty’s agency, or lack thereof, and its implications. In choosing to go to Westerbork, Etty, according to Des Pres is venerable as a hero because she takes upon herself the conditions of her victimhood and “chooses to find consummation in death.”¹⁴¹ In turn, however, he casts those unable to control the conditions of their deaths, such as those who were killed while resisting, outside of the category. Belonging to a tradition which valued resistance, Boas and her peers would have been entirely excluded per Des Pres’ definition. However, the heroism of which Des Pres speaks may not be a desirable designation even for Etty, who wrote to affirm the value of her life in spite of war, as Des Pres has reduced heroism into a condition of dying. Though Etty prepared herself for it, Etty’s writings were on the richness of life, not on the glory of death. Etty reveals an active effort not to retract or surrender to the ease of death, and, quoting Walther Rathenau’s *Letters to a Woman in Love*, writes, “I know that you suffer, and I suffer with you. Be kind to that suffering.”¹⁴² Though he was not Jewish, Des Pres spent a lifetime contemplating the Holocaust and its horrors. Des Pres made a career, as well, of this tragic heroism, assuming the role of secondary witness with eyes peeled until his death in 1987 at only 48 years old. Though the examiner’s office first ruled his death accidental, a *Boston Globe* article three years later revealed that Des Pres had, in his own words, consummated his death and, in fact, died by hanging. Speaking on why he wrote his book about survivors, he says, “in a way, I don’t know. In another way I wrote it simply because I felt I had to. And then, and it’s true, I wrote about them because I simply admire them, more than I can say,” admired what they were able to withstand and then that they were able to persist.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Des Pres, *The Survivor*, 5, 7.

¹⁴² Hillesum, *Etty*, 183.

¹⁴³ Des Pres, “The secondary witness,” 24:46–25:14.

Admired, perhaps, even after the pain, their will to live. Is there truly no pathos to be found in Etty's diaries? Is there no horror in death sharpening his scythe even if you cannot always see him from over your shoulder?

Etty: An Offering

In writing this paper I worked with the 2002 English edition of the diaries: *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941–1943*. A hefty hardcover book, the letters inscribed in gold on the spine, I carried this, carried her, with me for just over a month. In this sense I carried an actual weight, and too took it on in my heart. I am a Jewish woman, though in earnest I was not raised particularly religious at all. I never went to Hebrew school nor was I Bat Mitzvahed. Whether you think I am a daughter of the commandment in the traditional sense, I am nonetheless the daughter of two Jews and the granddaughter of four and so forth. I know this, every day in every moment, and I do not forget it. I do not ask anyone permission or request that anyone offer affirmation of my Jewishness because it is in me in the way my family is at the table and their thick New York accents always interrupting each other and the way we talk about sex and about survival. I am fortunate to have all this because I know it is a pure stroke of luck. I have a family alive and we are happy when so many others have died. And I carry that weight. And Etty's diaries mean something to me. These diaries which she says she wants to share, in part, "so that those who come after [her] do not have to start all over again."¹⁴⁴ What can I give her in return?

When Etty's diaries were first published, around two thirds of the diary was retracted in the name of propriety. These edits undeniably altered the obscurity which I believe to be most significant in Etty's writings. Gaarlandt and Smelik both recall Etty's scrawling script, slanted across the pages, her constant reiterations and refinements; I have only seen pictures. Though Etty's prose, perhaps, was clear, Etty was contending not only with the war but with herself, frequently unsatisfied with her work. Etty's feelings, as feelings are, were transitory,

¹⁴⁴ Hillesum, *Etty*, 462.

sometimes revoked the very next day. Etty attempts, throughout her diaries, not to impart a conclusion but to pull back the curtain and show us her struggle. Yet her suffering often remains unseen. Etty's critics, Boas and Patterson, who through their efforts have isolated Etty from her Jewish community and denied her legitimacy as a witness, reject Etty's claims to harm and to victimhood. DePres, however, who venerates Etty as a hero, though he takes her offering, certainly, with grace, engages with Etty receptively rather than reciprocally. I do agree with Des Pres that Etty has taken the conditions of her victimhood into her own hands. I am not certain that makes her a hero and, either way, I don't know if that matters.

Hero. I don't know if that word means anything to me. I don't think that Etty wanted to be a hero. I know I do not want to be. I think that we are all doing our best to survive. Etty resisted Nazism by attending to her interiority, though never turning away from those around her. I would argue that Etty attended to herself as unselfishly as possible: attended to herself so as to attend to others. It was her writing which sustained her, and in this sense, it was the very fact of having an offering, something to give, which for Etty made life worth living. It was because she wanted to offer hope to others that she worked to find it in herself. And yet, to focus entirely on Etty's offering to others, or Etty's offerings to us, we fail to grasp the tragedy of her death and thus attenuate her pains. I can see her suffering. I feel as though she sees mine.

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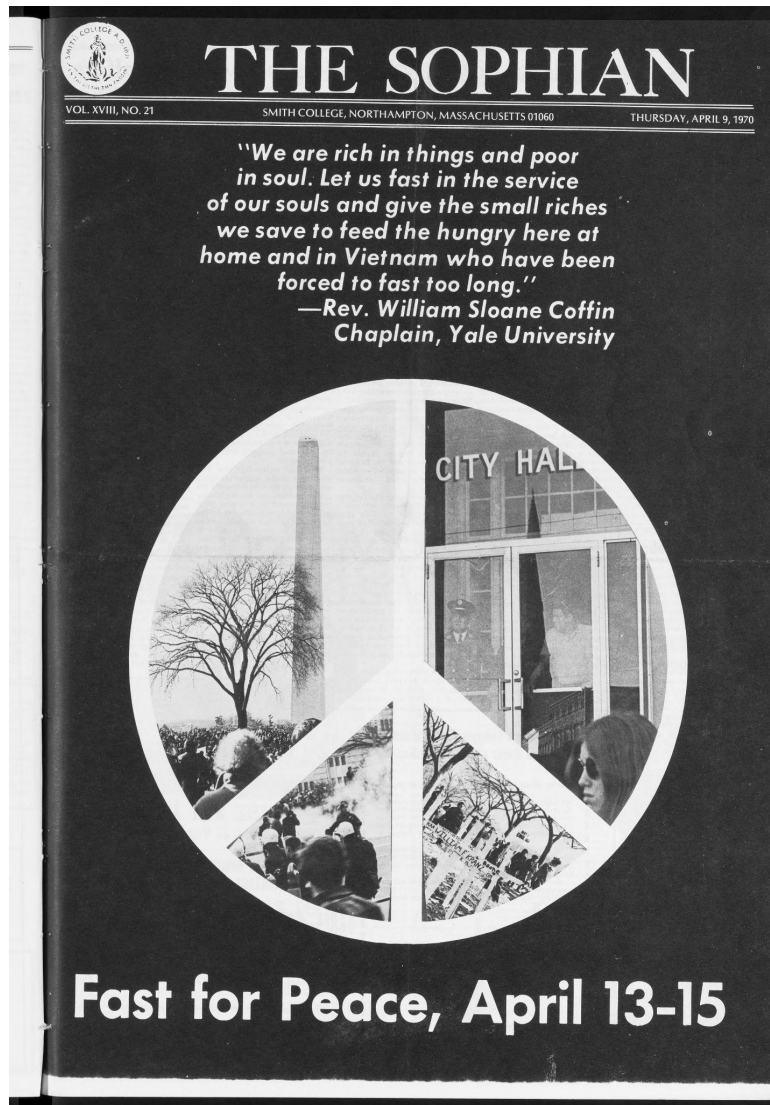
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**"We are Mourning:"
Expressions of Grief and Religiosity
in Vietnam War Resistance at Smith College**



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College Archives, Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, Massachusetts.*

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In February of 1968, twelve Smith and Amherst students stood in the snow across from Neilson Library, cloaked in black veils that covered their faces. Joined in solidarity by community members and professors, the students silently handed out leaflets stating: "We are mourning. We are mourning because a war is being fought in Viet Nam. We are mourning because our government is conducting this war... because our government is here today to ask us to aid them."¹ The group organized to protest the presence of a CIA researcher recruiter on campus, understanding that any CIA position only furthered the violence and death they gathered there to grieve. Alongside their statement of mourning, the students handed out a fact sheet on the CIA stressing their counterinsurgency program and work supporting coups in the "Third World."² These students had a clear antiwar ideology that moved them in their action. However, they did not solely work to change policy. In invoking the language of mourning, the group endeavored to understand both the moral and material loss enacted by the war. Across the antiwar movement, at Smith and beyond, activists contended with the violence of the U.S. state as towards both life itself and the identity of the nation.

As outlined by historians Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield in their book *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era*, the antiwar movement arose out of 1950s anti-nuclear peace advocacy.³ In the first half of the 1960s, further influenced by the New Left and the civil rights movement, increased American military involvement in Vietnam transformed anti-war resistance into its own social movement.⁴ Surfacing in community spaces—such as churches and colleges—antiwar dissidents organized demonstrations nationwide throughout the duration of the war. The number and strength of these protests varied over the Vietnam War period, particularly rising at times of higher casualties, such as the winter and spring of 1968, or the furthering of U.S. involvement in

¹ "Shrouded Demonstrators Protest CIA Recruitment," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 14, February 22, 1968, p. 2–8, Smith College Archives.

² "Shrouded Demonstrators," 8.

³ Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse University Press, 1990), 91.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

the region with the 1970 invasion of Cambodia.⁵ Strong in numbers, the antiwar movement represented a broad coalition for social change that both gave it a cutting edge and made it "vulnerable to fragmentation."⁶ Though diverse in motivation for their dissent, a sense of moral responsibility and outrage for American intervention in Vietnam anchored much of the antiwar opposition. Concern for Vietnamese and American life guided demonstrators, while many Americans experienced the war itself as a battle for national identity and dignity. The daily death tolls and the government rationale for continuing to enact such brutality further provoked people to question the meaning of American values and the purpose of military violence in the name of stopping communism. For many, the conflict became a personal reckoning with the meaning of war and society, mediated in homes, streets, and community spaces.⁷ Apprehension towards the war nationwide followed four main lines of criticism: that the war was immoral, that American intervention was futile, that intervention was counterproductive to global stability, and that it contradicted—if not corrupted—American ideals.⁸ All four of these critiques dominated wartime discourse at Smith College, but discussion of morality particularly stretched across years, demonstrations, and ideologies.

As early as 1964, staunch pushback against the moral imperative of American intervention in Vietnam dominated statements from national antiwar groups and leaders. Concerns for the moral implications of the war's violence, drawing on the emerging antiwar opposition's roots in the pacifist-led peace movement, often turned arguments for the moral need of the war in the protection of anti-communism ideals on their heads. Dissidents warned that the process of trying to "save" Vietnam from communism was destroying the people; fighting in the war for national honor was to "blow off heads to save face."⁹ The emerging antiwar opposition questioned the notion that the promotion of American ideals

⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁸ Ibid., 91.

⁹ Ibid., 95.

justified the bloodshed intervention caused or that the war had any moral justification at all. Instead of arguing that intervention saved the soul of America, they pushed just the opposite, often using these particularly religious terms. As antiwar activist and Presbyterian minister Norman Thomas expressed in 1965, "I'd rather see America save her soul than her face."¹⁰

Though many left-wing religious leaders and organizations supported the war effort, a vocal group staunchly opposed on moral grounds, further advocating for Vietnamese and American lives alike. Between 1967 and 1968, 26 Catholic intellectuals declared the war unjust, arguing that Christians had a moral obligation to oppose it. Protestant minister Robert McAfee Brown asserted that "the American war effort was 'evil, vicious, and morally intolerable.'"¹¹ Groups like the Catholic Worker Movement, newspaper *Christian Century*, and the Catholic Peace Fellowship, among others, made a continued effort in the 1960s to promote antiwar and pacifist thinking while criticizing the state for its unjustified violence. In 1968, one of the deadliest years of the war, the *Christian Century* proclaimed the war to be made of "the logic of men maddened by murder. We have all been made murderers."¹²

These same ideas characterized the discourse and resistance by Smith students and their faculty and peers at the four colleges (Smith, Amherst, Mount Holyoke, and University of Massachusetts Amherst) during the Vietnam War.¹³ Students saw the war effort as morally unjustified, threatening to young American men, and leading to murders that every American bore responsibility for. Religious ritual and language, in tandem with symbolic demonstrations of grief and mourning, provided a means for students to process the violence and death happening in Vietnam—both to American soldiers and Vietnamese civilians—not as a production of numbers but as tangible, human loss. Smith students and faculty, working with their peers at Amherst, contended with the same moral and political

¹⁰ Ibid., 132.

¹¹ Ibid., 195.

¹² Ibid., 210.

¹³ Though Hampshire opened in 1970, journalism and other materials related to antiwar activism tended to only mention the four colleges.

dilemmas that moved people across the country. Antiwar Smith students opposed the draft, supporting resisters and counseling local boys, organized protests and demonstrations, participated in strikes, and chronicled dissenting opinions in the campus newspaper, *The Sophian*. Moral disgust and notions of injustice saturated these actions, and students further moved to vocalize the quiet sense of mourning that underlined the period. Antiwar dissidents turned to symbolic demonstrations, utilizing the familiar framework of religious ritual and language, to process and acknowledge the death the war brought. At Smith, vigils, memorials, and fasts became regular occurrences for students and faculty to bear witness and bring awareness to the war's moral upheaval and disregard for human life. Smith's chapel, in moral alignment with antiwar students, worked to support undergraduates in their activism and grief. College religious leaders, particularly Reverend Richard P. Unsworth and Rabbi Yechiael Lander, were seminal in helping to organize these solemn actions, introducing religious language and practices to greater campus and community protests. Working within the national landscape, Smith students, faculty, staff, and community members brought the antiwar movement to Northampton.

The Students for Democratic Society (SDS) served as a way for Smith students to organize locally while working within a national framework. Emerging from the youth branch of the democratic socialist group the League for Industrial Democracy (LID) in 1960, SDS split off in 1962 due to a rejection of the anti-communist Cold War frameworks applied by their parent organization. In their Post Huron Statement, SDS laid out their vision for a better society, including "students' support for civil rights, disdain for nuclear proliferation, and hope for a progressive realignment of the Democratic Party" as well as disdain for Western authoritarianism in the East. They further refused to include an anti-communist clause in their statement, thus leading to the branch's separation.¹⁴ At its onset, SDS focused largely on civil rights and urban poverty rather than the war in Vietnam. However, by the end of 1964, there was a large—though unorganized—base of dissent against Vietnam policy

¹⁴ Dan Berger, *Outlaws of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity* (AK Press, 2006), 26.

both within SDS and across the country.¹⁵ After an escalation in the war in February of 1965, with the U.S. responding to Viet Cong strikes against American forces with a series of air strikes in North Vietnam, SDS led their first antiwar march on Washington. With 20,000 people in attendance, the group experienced an outpour of support double what they expected.¹⁶ Following the march, membership skyrocketed, with 12,000 people joining by 1966.¹⁷

In 1965, during this period of mass war escalation of the growing dissent, Smith and Amherst formed their own intercollegiate chapter of SDS. Though the Smith-Amherst chapter continued pursuing actions towards racial equality in its early years, as the war continued, they followed the national trend towards draft-focused antiwar actions. In September of 1967—off the heels of Vietnam Summer, a grassroots national campaign to mobilize protests against the war—80 members of the Smith-Amherst SDS met to decide on anti-draft actions for the year on campus, off campus, and at local high schools specifically. On campus, work was to center around draft counseling at Amherst and protesting military recruitment on campus, while off-campus work was to focus on coordinating with other SDS chapters in the national movement and "physically and morally" support the Springfield draft resistance group. Anti-draft work in local high schools educated younger students about the "important draft angles not publicized." At the same meeting, students organized an anti-draft protest for the sixteenth of that October when 5,000 men across the country were to turn in their draft cards. SDS "suggested girls support this program," reflecting a role Smith students commonly took in anti-draft actions as standing in solidarity with these demonstrations despite their own inability to be drafted.¹⁸

Smith students throughout the war saw part of their role in resistance as one of solidarity with young men vulnerable to the draft. Outlining the reasons for a campus-wide

¹⁵ DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 101.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁷ Berger, *Outlaws of America*, 28.

¹⁸ "SDS Decides on Anti-Draft Actions," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 2, September 28, 1967, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

fast in 1968 expressing hope for the war to end, organizer Kathy Green '68 described the action as "[illustrating] that, though we are women and not threatened by the draft, we have an obligation to speak out about the war."¹⁹ Kathy Rodgers '70 similarly described in her Alumnae Oral History Project interview that the antiwar movement was one of the biggest forces in her and her peers' time at Smith precisely because "our boyfriends and brothers and friends were being sent off to a war that, to many of us, didn't make sense."²⁰ The grief embodied by anti-war Smith students was often anticipatory. The fear of their loved ones being killed, or made to kill, in a fight they already saw as pointless if not immoral operated as the core motivation for Smith student opposition, rather than distress over Vietnamese lives, North or South. This concern for American lives in a vacuum permeated campus discourse surrounding the war, as it did nationally. Debates over intervention from the beginning to the end of the war centered on Americans, with Vietnamese welfare a secondary concern.²¹ One SDS demonstration that sheds light on this framework occurred on Rally Day 1968, a Smith tradition celebrating Smith Alum achievements that originated as a commemoration of George Washington's birthday.²² Outside of John M. Greene Hall, before the all-college assembly, Smith and Amherst SDS students distributed a "Rally Day Proclamation" with a crossword puzzle stressing similarities between the Vietnamese and American revolutions (following the theme "Spirit of '76"). After the assembly, five Amherst students in black robes stood in front of the John M. Greene, carrying long sticks over their shoulders, before jumping on the back of a hearse labeled "to Viet Nam."²³ The message of the demonstration was clear: not only was American condemnation of the Vietnamese revolution hypocritical, but to be sent to fight in Vietnam was a death sentence. In choosing

¹⁹ Alicia Campi, "1284 Students Fast, Rally for Peace in Viet Nam," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 16, March 7, 1968, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

²⁰ "Transcript of Interview with Kathryn 'Kathy' Rodgers," May 22, 2015, Alumnae Oral History Project collection, Smith College Archives, 3.

²¹ DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 4.

²² "Celebrate and Learn about Rally Day!," accessed December 2024, <https://libraries.smith.edu/news/celebrate-and-learn-about-rally-day>.

²³ "Students Applaud Rally Day Speaker; Spirit-of-'76, SDS, Hearse Outside," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 15, February 29, 1968, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

to invoke funeral imagery, SDS members pushed onlookers to contend with the violence inherent to battle, especially as their male peers were put at risk of being drafted.

Smith-Amherst SDS members further expressed their opposition to the war as a general sense of moral disgust to the American government's actions in the region. Discussing the aforementioned 1968 fast at Smith, Smith-Amherst SDS president Eric Bohman '70 expressed the action as a means to "register our sorrow and anger, our disgust over the war in Viet Nam... the evil War... a liberal's war."²⁴ 1,284 Smith students, five faculty, and two locals fasted, while 366 students, forty-five faculty, and thirty-one locals demonstrated support in the form of wearing green armbands over the three days the fast took place. Fasters, on the other hand, wore black armbands resembling those of a mourner.²⁵ Though secular in organization, reasons for the fast were, in part, framed in religious language. When asked what the students were doing while speaking at the opening rally for the fast, Professor Ramon Ruiz stated that they were "making a statement, through the media, that we can admit sin."²⁶ Smith's Rev. Unsworth further defined fasting as a "religious act to produce a religious effect—that is sorrow, and commitment—not simply a political act."²⁷ Unsworth framed the moral opposition expressed by the student body in religious terms, and by including Rev. Unsworth in the rally, the students did the same. The reverend closed out the action, with students gathering to reflect with Unsworth before breaking their fasts. For these students, religious gatherings provided a means to communicate and feel their discontentment with the war.

Organized as an educational and individually reflective form of war resistance, some students (such as the satirical student organization Students for an Undemocratic Society) condemned the fast as useless.²⁸ However, as Rev. Unsworth elaborated on in a later *Sophian* article, the fast was meant to be "right, not useful," raising awareness for the

²⁴ Campi, "1284 Students Fast," 3.

²⁵ "Opposition to War Stirs Student Plan to Fast for Peace," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 15, February 29, 1968, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

²⁶ Campi, "1284 Students Fast," 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁸ Linda Kent, "Students for an Undemocratic Society Protest Against SDS Demonstrations," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 16, March 7, 1968, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

suffering happening in Vietnam and the "absurdity of the bloodletting" occurring. The fast was a tool for "intensification of a person's thought about and concern about the personal consequences of the war to Vietnamese society and to our own."²⁹ During a war seen by many as a moral indictment of American society, fasts asked people to contend with the implications of the violence in Vietnam while quietly bringing it into the public eye. These actions thus worked to tackle the war on the home front, rather than making a direct attempt to change the political landscape. From April 13th to 15th of 1970, students participated in a nationwide Peace Fast from April under a similar rationale. The fast was in moral opposition to the continuation of the war and its economic expenditures, with people asked to send the money they saved from not eating for three days to the victims of the war. The fast represented a commitment to "improve the quality of human life and alleviate human suffering." Referring to a rally held during the three days, student Kay Stewart conveyed that "a fast is so quiet, so personal. This is one way to make it public, to add deeper meaning to our efforts."³⁰ As in 1968, the fast worked to draw public attention and awareness while addressing the internal moral concerns of the dissent. Yale chaplain William Sloane Coffin, as reported in *The Sophian*, advertised the fast as "in service of our souls."³¹ As part of this personal service, Smith students again closed out their fast with a gathering in the college chapel, inviting people to speak on their personal experiences. The 1970 fast remained further cognisant of the tangible human toll of the war, honoring those lost in a vigil that Tuesday on the Neilson Library lawn, one of many vigils Smith and Northampton saw throughout the war.

In April of 1967, 30 Smith students and faculty stood silently in front of Neilson Library. Lined up in a semicircle, hands clasped, the participants had one goal: "to draw

²⁹ Alicia Campi, "Participants Discuss Meaning of Peace Fast," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 17, March 14, 1968, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

³⁰ Marlene Bellamy, "5-College Fast Wednesday Highlights Community Peace-Plea," *Sophian*, vol. 18, no. 21, April 9, 1970, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

³¹ *Sophian*, vol. 18, no. 21, April 9, 1970, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

attention to the fact that 'a war is going on, and people are getting killed.'"³² Weekly vigils like Smith's began across the country that spring, serving as solemn demonstrations organized to contend with popular moral discontent with the war. Northampton was one of the twenty towns and cities to begin this work.³³ In February of 1967, a group of concerned Northampton citizens organized a weekly, hour-long vigil in front of Northampton's Memorial Hall to express their pain in the face of widespread apathy towards the war and its consequences.³⁴ Often advertised by faculty organizers in *The Sophian*, these vigils reflected a sense of communal responsibility felt by the participants as Americans for the violence of the war. As the organizers stated as their official purpose, they joined to "express our sorrow and protest because we Americans are killing and being killed in Viet Nam."³⁵ Starting the same year, students, faculty, and community members similarly worked with the Valley Peace Center to host weekly gatherings at the Amherst Town Common for one hour at noon.³⁶ Unlike protests and political actions intended to change U.S. policy in Vietnam, vigils grappled with the moral battle the war spurred in the U.S. itself. As Professor Michael Rice, a regular attendee of the town peace vigil, described, "the chief beneficiaries of the vigils are the participants."³⁷ Like fasts, vigils provided a space for community members to process and share feelings of sorrow and moral outrage for US involvement with the war with like-minded people. Further, they allowed participants to feel like they were "doing something." As Rice put it, he hoped the vigil would contribute to public recognition of the tangible bloodshed occurring at the hands of US weaponry; "that human beings (mostly a-political peasants) are the real victims of the war." The vigil served not as a means of pushing against the war as a battle of abstract political ideologies, but instead as a fight with

³² "Peace Vigils Protest U.S. Viet Nam Policy," *Sophian*, vol. 15, no. 21, April 6, 1967, Smith College Archives, Smith College Archives.

³³ DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 172.

³⁴ J. Diedrick Snoek, "Peace Vigil Changes to Saturday Morning," *Sophian*, vol. 17, no. 3, , Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

³⁵ Michael Rice, "Vigiler Discusses Ideas Inspiring Silent 'Ritual,'" *Sophian*, vol. 15, no. 21, April 6, 1967, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

³⁶ Gini Erck, "Faculty, Student Initiate Protests Against Viet War," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 5, October 19, 1967, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

³⁷ Rice, "Vigiler on Ritual."

deadly consequences for innocent lives and with little hope of an American victory. In March of 1969, Smith junior Rhoda Micconi reported on a six-hour vigil held in Northampton in response to the army's handling of the Presidio 27—an incident the previous October in which 27 inmates at the Presidio army stockade in San Francisco were held in mutiny for a peaceful sit-down protest against the Vietnam war. Fifty people stood on Main Street, across from the Northampton National Bank, handing out over 500 leaflets reading "Until These Men Are Free, None Of Us Is Free."³⁸ Though the vigil did not free those imprisoned, it allowed participants to express their support for their fellow dissidents while honoring and reflecting on their actions.

The Presidio vigil arose during a lull in antiwar activism following the 1968 election. During that November, Smith student journalism and demonstrations largely focused on the presidential race and election of Nixon. Following the election, for example, *The Sophian's* cover page featured only a large picture of Nixon's face accompanied by a quote from Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen stating "A lie, turned topsy-turvy, can be prinked and tinselled out, decked in plumage new and fine, till none knows its lean old carcass."³⁹ The Editorial Board expressed further dismay for Nixon's win, citing his lack of clarity on Vietnam and economic plans detrimental to Black populations.⁴⁰ For weeks after, people flooded the newspaper with complaints and letters to the editor both for and against the controversial cover—some even cited it as unkind to Julie Nixon, the president's daughter and a Smith student at the time.⁴¹ While anti-war student organizing continued during this time, the focus of students across the country largely shifted to issues related to curricula and social rules.⁴² At Smith, student activism primarily surrounded the creation of the open curriculum and an African-American Studies department.

³⁸ Rhoda Micconi, "Army Trials Arouse Nationwide Response," *Sophian*, vol. 17, no. 18, March 20, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

³⁹ *Sophian*, vol. 17, no. 7, November 7, 1968, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴⁰ *Sophian*, "No Mandate," vol. 17, no. 7, November 7, 1968, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴¹ Paul Pickrel, "Apology Requested," *Sophian*, vol. 17, no. 8, November 14, 1968, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴² DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 243.

Over the later 1960s and early 1970s, activism at Smith went beyond solely discussing the war. In early March of 1969, the Black Student Union, at the push of Smith's Black Students Union (BSA), the Committee on Educational Policy announced that they would recommend to the faculty at their April meeting the introduction of an Afro-American Studies major the following year.⁴³ The BSA assisted on a committee to find a new director of admissions, pushing for an increase in Black applications and acceptances to Smith.⁴⁴ Through 1970, colleges throughout the Valley joined in advocating for autonomy over Afro-American studies programs as well as cultural spaces and resources for Black students.⁴⁵ On May 6th, 1969, the college canceled all classes to allow students and faculty to discuss the curriculum demands happening on campus.⁴⁶ These discourses culminated in the removal of non-major related degree requirements and the creation of Smith's current open curriculum in 1970.⁴⁷ Students in Hubbard House further pushed for changes in Smith's regulation of behavior in the fall of 1969, submitting a proposal for houses to create their own social rules rather than following those made by the institution.⁴⁸ However, amidst these various student demands, Vietnam War dissent remained present on campus, though at times quieter than other student causes. Antiwar activism at Smith reemerged with greater strength in the fall of 1969 with the organization of the Moratorium.

The Moratorium began nationally on October 15th, 1969, as a national day to stop everyday business in recognition and reflection of the violence occurring in Vietnam.⁴⁹ At Smith, chapel leaders Rev. Unsworth and Rabbi Yander, alongside student coordinator

⁴³ Ellen Kanner, "Dean Lehmann Clarifies Black Studies Program," *Sophian*, vol. 17, no. 18, March 20, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴⁴ Sandra Fascell, "BSA Rep on Committee to Select Admissions Director," *Sophian*, vol. 17, no. 17, March 13, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴⁵ *Sophian*, "Black Students Stage Take-Over at Amherst, Issue Demands to Valley Colleges, Call for Autonomy Over Black Programs," vol. 18, no. 16, February 19, 1970, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴⁶ Thomas C. Mendenhall and Kathryn J. Rodgers, "Formal Announcement," *Sophian*, vol. 17, no. 22, May 1, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴⁷ *Sophian*, "Faculty Vote to Abolish Course Requirements," *Sophian*, vol. 18, no. 15, February 12, 1970, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴⁸ Sherry Strasser, "SAC Meets to Discuss Hubbard House Proposal," *Sophian*, vol. 18, no. 8, November 6, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁴⁹ DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 248.

Chuca Meyer '70, organized the local Moratorium.⁵⁰ Rabbi Lander sent out letters of interest to the faculty, while students released a petition discussing the "senselessness of the war" and asking their peers to go against business as usual.⁵¹ Prior to the first Moratorium, *The Sophian* reported 123 faculty members favored the action, with widespread support from the student body.⁵² Writing a Letter to the Editor of *The Sophian* that same issue, Unsworth advocated for the necessity of the Moratorium, proclaiming that "in the months of March through September of this year, more than one hundred fifteen thousand individual human beings have been killed in the war in VietNam," not including civilian deaths.⁵³ Invoking the loss of life as the primary motivation for the Moratorium, Unsworth again framed the war as an immoral act demanding opposition precisely because of the deaths it caused. Despite a decline in public outcry, the war marched on, with the only hope of stopping it resting on the people. Writing with Rabbi Lander to their religious colleagues the week before the Moratorium, the two men sought wider support and sympathy stating that "The purpose of this day is to focus the attention of our citizenry on the Vietnam War and its mountain toll of human suffering; to protest its continuation and to call upon our government to increase and speed its efforts for peace."⁵⁴ They encouraged their colleagues to devote part of their services to the Moratorium and the war, advocating for the suspension of normal activities. Further, the Reverend and Rabbi noted plans for a silent vigil for all clergymen near Northampton's City Hall. For Rev. Unsworth and Rabbi Lander opposing the war was not only a moral but a religious calling, demanding peace and safety for all people.

Clergy had been prominent in the antiwar movement from its genesis. In 1966, Yale chaplain William Sloane Coffin created the National Emergency Committee of Clergy

⁵⁰ Sherry Allen, "Town, College Communities to Rally for Myriad Activities on October 15th," *Sophian*, vol. 18, no. 5, October 9, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁵¹ "Petition Against 'Business as Usual,'" October 15, 1969, Richard P. Unsworth papers, Smith College Archives.

⁵² Allen, "October 15th."

⁵³ Richard P. Unsworth, "Letter to the Editor of the *Sophian*," October 8, 1969, Richard P. Unsworth papers, Smith College Archives.

⁵⁴ Richard P. Unsworth and Yechiael Lander, "Letter on the Moratorium," October 7, 1969, Richard P. Unsworth papers, Smith College Archives.

Concerned about Vietnam. Describing his rationale in a New York press conference, Sloane advised "for it may well be that morally speaking the United States ship of state is today comparable to the Titanic just before it hit the iceberg. If we decide on all-out escalation of the war in Vietnam, then to all intents and purposes of the human soul we may be sunk."⁵⁵ With these concerns in mind, Coffin went on to join one of the most prominent antiwar organizations during the Vietnam era, particularly among the religious community, Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam (CALCAV). Fellow members included Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Reverend John Bennett, and Martin Luther King Jr.⁵⁶ As liberal dissent among clergy towards the war grew in 1966, and coming out of strong interfaith cooperation achieved in the struggle for civil rights, Coffin became pivotal in connecting the two causes and leading the religious opposition moving forward. Having served in WWII and the Korean War, worked in international service, and protested segregation, Coffin had connections to clergy in support of the civil rights movement and trained his constituency on matters related to Vietnam in 1965.⁵⁷ Smith's Rabbi Lander and Rev. Unsworth thus acted within a greater pattern of religious leaders taking a strong stand against Vietnam and using their community platform to project these views.

On the national scale, Divinity School graduate Sam Brown largely organized the Moratorium, and across the country, Moratorium activities featured religiously oriented activities reflective of its local and national organizers.⁵⁸ The Moratorium reflected "the changing nature of the war for America... It expressed a nation longing to find meaning in its losses—something more than empty humiliation."⁵⁹ Just as vigils gave way to expressing this sense of loss, solemn gatherings and acts of remembrance continued to do so during the Moratorium. At Smith, a candlelit march led students and community members to the local Unitarian Church at 7 p.m. on the fifteenth to attend an interfaith memorial service where a

⁵⁵ Mitchell K. Hall, "Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam: A Study of Opposition to the Vietnam War." (PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 1987), 1.

⁵⁶ Hall, "Clergy and Laymen", 27.

⁵⁷ DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 144.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 257.

list of those from Hampshire County dead in the war would be read.⁶⁰ An estimated 1,500 people attended. Giving the benediction, Rabbi Lander stated "We shall not remain silent in our quest for Peace. May you go in Peace. Be strong and in good courage," encouraging students to keep their voices in the movement.⁶¹ St John's Episcopal Church in town hosted a "Pray for Peace" brief interfaith service every hour from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.⁶² In a *Sophian* pictorial, student Sherry Allen described the Moratorium as "a Sabbath disengagement... the goal is the formation and expression of will."⁶³ Framing the day in such religious terms and centered around actions of faith, many Smith students, faculty, and Northampton community members understood the Moratorium and their views of the war itself as a moral dilemma with answers found in their religiosity.

The Moratorium continued monthly on the fifteenth through April of 1970, when it was dedicated to the national fast. Local homes held discussions with faculty, students, clergy, and locals to discuss the Moratorium and the war as a whole throughout this time.⁶⁴ In November of 1969, the local committee planning the war further emphasized the Moratorium as a reflection upon wartime grief, encouraging student houses to purchase American flags to be flown half-mast from November 13th through 15th. That same month, they organized a candlelight ceremony at the Amherst Town Common, including a procession, a reading of the names of young Massachusetts men killed in Vietnam, and a solemn observance led by Rabbi Martin Kowal from the University of Massachusetts Amherst.⁶⁵ Writing to *The Sophian* in 1968 about the importance of the antiwar movement, community member Nancy Rice argued that while Christmas approached with its "extraordinary demands that we love one another and prove that we do so with gifts,

⁶⁰ Allen, "October 15th."

⁶¹ *Sophian*, "Estimated 1,500 Attended Interfaith Service at the Unitarian Church," October 16, 1969, vol. 18, no. 6, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁶² *Sophian*, "October 15, 1969," vol. 18, no. 16., October 16, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁶³ Sherry Allen, "A Pictorial," *Sophian*, vol. 18, no. 6, October 16, 1969 Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁶⁴ *Sophian*, "Smith-Amherst Buses Travel to D.C. Death March; Goodell, McGovern to Address Rally on Saturday," vol. 18, no. 9, November 13, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁶⁵ *Sophian*, "November Moratorium to Happen Here," vol. 18, no. 8, November 6, 1969, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

including gifts of life... people are losing their lives in Viet Nam."⁶⁶ As a whole, the Moratoriums worked to acknowledge this disconnect, suspending the everyday life of Americans in recognition of how the war has destroyed and upended the lives of so many.

Despite the Moratorium, anti-war demonstrations decreased in 1969 through early 1970. However, after the April 29th invasion of Cambodia, this quickly shifted. Despite Nixon's insistence the invasion was not a widening of the war, activists in New York and Philadelphia took to the streets within minutes. On May 2nd, two radical students at a Yale Black Panther support rally advocated for a national student strike, quickly endorsed by seven Ivy-League newspapers, the National Student Association, the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, and New Mobilization. Two days later, on May 4th, four unarmed Kent State University students were shot and killed by the Ohio National Guard at a rally against the invasion of Cambodia.⁶⁷ The Smith student strike began in the wake of this massacre.

A call to suspend normal activity, the strike built on the same ideas that formed and guided the Moratoriums. As described in the first Smith Strike newsletter, the strike was for three demands: for the end of the U.S. government's systematic oppression of political dissidents and release of all political prisoners, particularly those from the Black Panther Party; that the government end the calculation of the Vietnam War into Cambodia and Laos and withdraw all forces from Southeast Asia; and that Smith "end its complicity with the United States war machine" by ending campus recruiting by corporations tied to the government and military.⁶⁸ However, debates surfaced among the Smith Strike Committee regarding maintaining the national set goals of the strike or not. Namely, some students felt the strike would only gain necessary support if Cambodia was the main issue. In line with these concerns, the committee redrafted the petition for the strike with the last line, stating

⁶⁶ Nancy Rice, "Wisdom of Demonstrating," *Sophian*, vol. 16, no. 11, December 14, 1967, Student publications and student publications records, Smith College Archives.

⁶⁷ DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 278.

⁶⁸ "Strike Committee- Newsletters, May 4 - 31, 1970," May 1970, Student Strike of 1970 collection, Smith College Archives, 2.

"power to the people," removed and Cambodia made to be the first issue. Though some argued that "the strike was not defined by speeches," students continued to push for race as a topic in the demonstration. At a 5 p.m. meeting the same day, one student stated that "Cambodia was not the main issue" and that students who thought that were racists. At the same meeting, "half-hearted sympathy" was extended to the Black Panther party, with a quiet sense of failure for not pushing for the strike's goals regarding American racial inequality.⁶⁹ On May 6th, a BSA member highlighted the falseness of emphasizing Cambodia rather than the oppression of Black Americans.⁷⁰ Another student told a professor she stopped striking after realizing the underlying racism of the war that the Strike Committee overlooked.⁷¹ While the Strike Committee worked to maintain the appearance of a unified front, racial tensions continued to underlie the action.

Some students further expressed doubt over the political effectiveness of the strike. For example, one student wrote a one-page newspaper titled *The Screwdriver*, Volume 2, number 1, on May 5th with a single article asking "Is the strike a good idea?"⁷² The author argued that workshops can occur while finishing the semester on time. Regardless of their position on the strike, however, a majority of students planned to attend the strike's rally on its eve.⁷³ Sending out ballots to vote for the strike on May 5th, 1,546 Smith students voted in favor compared to the 436 who voted against.⁷⁴ The faculty further endorsed the strike of the majority of students and supported "their efforts to educate themselves, eliminate repression and effect changes in foreign policy," advocating for a break in normal college activities from May 6th through the 10th.⁷⁵ Prior to and throughout the strike, students and faculty articulated the strike as an educational tool rather than a campaign against Smith. Along the same lines, tensions between students and the college appeared minimal.

⁶⁹ "Dairy - Sarah Gordon, '72," n.d., Student Strike of 1970 collection, Smith College Archives.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ "Correspondence- Aldrich, Michele, May 4 - 20, 1970," Student Strike of 1970 collection, Smith College Archives, accessed December 23, 2024.

⁷² "Strike Committee- Newsletters."

⁷³ "Dairy - Sarah Gordon, '72."

⁷⁴ "Strike Committee- Newsletters," 4.

⁷⁵ "Memoranda- Faculty and Staff, Apr 17 - Jun 1, 1970, Undated," Student Strike of 1970 collection, Smith College Archives.

President Mendenhall announced that while the college would not endorse the strike, they would allow it. However, the president and faculty spoke at rallies over the course of the strike.⁷⁶ In a letter from the meeting of the faculty, faculty further condemned the invasion of Cambodia, positioning themselves as in line with striking students.⁷⁷ The registrar accommodated the strike as well, creating a revised schedule for final exams and granting extensions.

For the duration of the strike, activities largely centered on political organizing and education. In daily newsletters, printed with *The Sophian's* facilities, the Strike Committee listed opportunities for leafleting, community outreach, and organizing to bring students to Washington. Students were further encouraged to write to their senators and representatives in support of the Hatfield-McGovern Amendment to end the war. Replying to the students, senators cited their grief and horror at the war's casualties and the violence at Kent State University. In a telegram sent to student Ellen Kanner, senators George McGovern, Mark Hatfield, and three other senators wrote that they were "shocked and grieved by the tragedy that occurred at Kent State" and filled with a sense of guilt over the lack of alternatives provided by the Congress, emphasizing grief as a force present both in the lives of dissenting students and politicians.⁷⁸ Throughout the day, professors gave lectures on topics related to Vietnam and the military industrial complex. Through the strike, faculty continued a tradition of using their academic knowledge and positions to aid students in their fight against further violence and escalation. Rev. Unsworth supported students in his role, giving lectures of revolutionary texts in the Bible and the ethics of war.⁷⁹ The chapel further lent its support to students, using its spaces for meetings and classes while aiding student newsletter printing when needed.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ "Dairy - Sarah Gordon, '72."

⁷⁷ "Press Releases and Letters to Editor, May, 1970, Undated," Student Strike of 1970 collection, Smith College Archives.

⁷⁸ "Correspondence- United States Congress, May 7 - Jul 7, 1970, Undated," Student Demonstrations collection, Smith College Archives.

⁷⁹ "Strike Committee- Newsletters," 24.

⁸⁰ "Dairy - Sarah Gordon, '72."

Spaces for grief, religious reflection, and organizing continued to anchor the strike as they anchored resistance throughout the war. A student Church Action Committee worked with local clergy in support of the strike and dissent towards the war.⁸¹ In a Community Actions Through Churches meeting at Edwards Congregational Church in downtown Northampton, Lucy Bodine '72 and other unnamed students organized another meeting in the campus chapel lounge. The meeting totaled forty Smith students, fifteen members of the clergy or area activists, and Rev. Unsworth and Rabbi Lander.⁸² In this way, religious gatherings provided another outlet for students to gather and contend with the war while connecting with the antiwar movement outside of Smith's campus. In the wake of violence against antiwar protesters, religious ritual further provided a sense of comfort and condolence. On May 8th, 1970, the day began with an interfaith memorial service for those killed in the Kent State shooting. The service included a performance of a folk song and readings from Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Psalm 130, declaring "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, oh Lord."⁸³ The memorial closed with a reading of the Mourner's Kaddish, collectively acknowledging the young lives lost at Kent State University.⁸⁴ On the 12th, the murder of Black 16-year-old Charles Oakman occurred in Georgia followed by the murder of six other Black people the ensuing night. The Smith Strike Committee quickly released a letter condemning the murders. Despite previous moves to minimize the centrality of racial equality in Smith's strike, the Committee asserted that ending the war in Vietnam would not stop racialized violence in the U.S., calling for work to end "the oppression at home" and articulating that if no action was taken on these deaths, then the strike was for nothing.⁸⁵ On the 15th, a memorial service was held at Paradise Pond for the seven dead, led by Rev. Unsworth and student Dale Lewis.⁸⁶ Strike activities continued at Smith through the end of May, up to commencement. While American troops did not leave

⁸¹ "Strike Committee- Newsletters," 11.

⁸² "Diary- Lucy Bodine, '72, 1970-05-08 - 1970-05-16," Student Strike of 1970 collection, Smith College Archives.

⁸³ "Strike Committee- Newsletters."

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 35.

Vietnam until 1973, the strike marked a peak in student antiwar activism both at Smith and beyond.

Throughout the antiwar movements, criticisms of actions as useless or politically ineffective came with every major demonstration. However, for many, these actions were not solely intended to stop the war. Rather, they gave students a voice to express that the war was not supported by all. Antiwar actions, at Smith and on college campuses across the country, permeate Vietnam War history today and remind the modern reader how the war was experienced by so many. In remembering dissent, people are forced to recall the grief and heartache at the heart of the war, and the lives that were lost and forever changed. While vigils and memorials did not make a political impact in Smith students' antiwar activism, they served as a place for people to cry out when they felt nothing else could be done. Filled with horror over the death and violence which surrounded them and feeling hopefulness to prevent it, these rituals gave space to place and process internalized grief. Acts of mourning allowed students to let the world around them know that, in the face of unmitigated death for what many seemed like a pointless cause, the lives that were lost mattered. In gathering with others, they could find comfort in those who felt the same.

Smith's activism was a smaller part of a broader national antiwar movement. However, it is the actions of small cities, towns, and colleges that allowed the national movement to survive. As DeBenedetti and Chatfield astutely argued, "the call for protest was national, but the response was overwhelmingly local." In studying antiwar activism at a smaller institution like Smith, one can understand the complexities within the national movement more broadly and where its strengths and cracks came about. As historians of the Vietnam War era often emphasize, the movement arose as a broad coalition for social change, granting it a wide array of support which paradoxically made it vulnerable to splintering. Throughout the movement, however, the grief and despair felt by its participants permeated their efforts and rationale. Across backgrounds, people found

comfort among their peers in placing this grief as a community and using it to motivate them to change the world around them.

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**A Room of Her Own:
The Spatial Impulse of Feminism at Smith College**



"Invaluable Information," Student Clubs and Organizations records, Box 3004.5, College Archives, CA-MS-00022, Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, MA

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Feminists of the 1960s and 70s, emboldened by concurrent liberation movements and critical texts such as Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*, moved outside of the domestic sphere into self-designed spaces created solely to empower women. Their encompassing movement, known as second-wave feminism, expanded upon the previous fight for suffrage by advocating for social equities often with a more radical tone. The foundation of the movement was women shaping themselves "around the limitations and possibilities of local geographies" as they transformed local buildings into centers for radical organizing.¹ The women's liberation movement mainly spread through its physical dimension, which manifested in the creation of separatist spaces that embodied the values of the women who built them. These included women's centers on college campuses which had goals of advocating "for women on campus and making both the institution and individual women aware of the[ir] changing status."² While feminists had a variety of strategies to enact their beliefs, producing physical spaces for consciousness raising and coalition building defined this era of women's organizing.

When women entered the public realm en masse during the twentieth century, women's centers served as a private gathering point for empowerment on the basis of gender in contrast to the misogyny experienced both at home and at work. Many recognized that "these places built the feminist movement" by fostering communities built upon a shared resistance to misogynistic oppression.³ The creation of these spaces fall under the term "spatial feminist organizing" as they signified "a sense of solidarity among women" who occupied them.⁴ Despite being a historically women's college, the physical environment of Smith College did not cultivate consciousness raising discussions. Most classes focused on reinforcing a patriarchal worldview and often erased women's roles in their respective fields

¹ Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Duke University Press, 2007), 6.

² Beth Willinger, "Women's Centers, Their Missions, and the Process of Change," in *University and College Women's Centers: The Changing Landscape*, ed. Sharon L. Davie (Greenwood Press, 2002), 47.

³ Daphne Spain, *Constructive Feminism: Women's Spaces and Women's Rights in the American City* (Cornell University Press, 2016), 51.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

to emulate the education received at prestigious universities.⁵ These male-centered curricula limited conversations on feminism across campus since it restricted education on women's history and political power.

The women's movement had found advocates on college campuses, with the University of Minnesota creating one of the first Women's Centers in 1948, although most colleges did not create their own center until the 1970s.⁶ Sophia Smith bequeathed her fortune in 1871 to fund Smith College due to the lack of higher education institutions for women. Elite colleges excluded women on the basis of their gender until 1969 at Yale, the first Ivy League to become co-ed, and 1975 at nearby Amherst College.⁷ At Smith College's inception, women were not viewed as students; it was a title they fought to have as President Seelye, the inaugural President of Smith, had to assure potential donors that women could still be domestic with a college education.⁸ Even when women enter the university, whether as a student or faculty member, sexism remains present through male-focused curriculum, lack of respect for women in academia, and a pay gap between female and male professors.⁹ From its founding, Smith existed to educate women, but never wanted to challenge the patriarchal world in which it lived.¹⁰ At the inception of spatial feminist organizing at Smith, the college had never had a woman president and continuously diminished the contributions of women faculty, as shown through gender discrimination lawsuits and the lauding of male faculty.¹¹ The administration had built the school to patronize students, as every detail from the housing system to the heights of the steps to the proximity to downtown had been carefully chosen to reinforce traditional femininity within students.¹² Despite being an all-women's college, Smith was not a feminist institution.

⁵ Jill Ker Conway, *A Woman's Education* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 41.

⁶ Candance Rosovsky, "Libraries at the Center," in *University and College Women's Centers: The Changing Landscape*, ed. Sharon L. Davie (Greenwood Press, 2002), 405.

⁷ Marc Sollinger, "When Women Entered the Ivies," *GBH*, March 23, 2017, <https://www.wgbh.org/news/2017-03-23/when-women-entered-the-ivies>.

⁸ Helen Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 73.

⁹ Estelle Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (Ballantine Books, 2002), 160.

¹⁰ Conway, *A Woman's Education*, 43.

¹¹ Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 180.

¹² *Ibid.*, 71.

Smith College's Women's Resource Center (WRC) began in 1974 as a central space for feminists to tangibly enact their politics on campus. Upon its inception, the primary focus of the center was to "coordinate the services available to women at the college" while also having a library and "plans to invite more women speakers."¹³ The center was a home base for building community. The organizers intended for it to be available for any student to engage in discussion or learn more about themselves. It was not necessarily a third space, or a space meant to differentiate itself from home or work, but an alternative to the housing system that forced Smith students into separate cliques as the dining system and social lives revolved around their insular residence. The center aimed to cultivate solidarity through personal connections based on a common oppression rather than a shared living space. A women's center had a particular role on a historically women's college campus, as organizers presumed that all students would be interested by most, if not all, the services offered. They hoped to raise awareness for women's issues and activist causes on a campus full of the people affected by them. From the start the WRC recognized ways in which Smith's infrastructure contributed to the oppression of women and intended to counter it through their supplemental programming.

In February of 1973, an unnamed women's consciousness raising group associated with Smith Political Action (SPA) convened to celebrate Susan B. Anthony's birthday. SPA was a group focused on supporting progressive causes, such as the United Fruit Workers' boycotts on produce. Students revived the group in 1972 after the reelection of President Nixon as the continued popularity of a President whose actions they opposed agitated students.¹⁴ Much like the wider movement for women's liberation, feminist activism on Smith's campus "grew out of both the civil rights and student movements of the 1960s" as demonstrated through their association with SPA.¹⁵ At the party, the women decided to

¹³ Deirdre Greenwood, "Women's Center Organized; Plans Info Coordination," *Sophian*, November 15, 1973, Volume 22, Number 8, Student publications and student publications records, College Archives, CA-MS-01049, Smith College Special Collections.

¹⁴ Barbara Bassner, "SPA Reconvenes," *Sophian*, vol. 22, no. 2, September 27, 1973, Student publications and student publications records, College Archives, CA-MS-01049, Smith College Special Collections.

¹⁵ Estelle Freedman, *No Turning Back* (Ballantine Books, 2002), 86.

honor International Women's Day in March with a weekend dedicated to discussing feminist issues, which they named the Women's Weekend.¹⁶ The event occurred from April 6–8 with workshops ranging from a movie about mining unions to a panel about academia with a professor from Hunter College.¹⁷ The workshop with the largest impact was the discussion on lesbianism in which about forty women participated. Most of them came out as gay before the end of their meeting and spent the remainder of the time discussing the difficulties of being queer at Smith.¹⁸ After this initial meeting, these women began to meet as an underground student group known as The Sophiasisters. They created space on campus for themselves in the vein of “the utopian world that lesbian-feminists envisioned” as they solely addressed lesbian issues and made their needs visible as a unique group of students.¹⁹ Unlike some of their contemporaries, the Sophiasisters seemed more amenable to educating heterosexual women about their sexuality. However, for safety, they created barriers to join the organization and many women in the group had to hide their affiliation.

The second Women's Weekend occurred on November 2–4 led by the same unnamed group, with contributions from the Sophiasisters.²⁰ The final panel about future actions resulted in planning for a Women's Resource Center. Centers emerging at other colleges, such as the Everywoman's Center at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and the Valley Women's Center in downtown Northampton, inspired these women.²¹ The founders wished to join the women's movement that had been “establishing places that reinforced women's

¹⁶ Elisa Spungen, “Women's Group Develops Project,” *Sophian*, vol. 21, no. 13, February 22, 1973, Student publications and student publications records, College Archives, CA-MS-01049, Smith College Special Collections.

¹⁷ Beth Taylor, “Weekend Symposium Focuses on Women,” *Sophian*, vol. 21, no. 16, April 5, 1973, Student publications and student publications records, College Archives, CA-MS-01049, Smith College Special Collections.

¹⁸ Amy Hill, “Weekend Workshop Helps Lesbians Examine Dilemma,” *Sophian*, vol. 21, no. 17, April 12, 1973, Student publications and student publications records, College Archives, CA-MS-01049, Smith College Special Collections.

¹⁹ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (Columbia University Press, 1991), 218.

²⁰ Jill Abeshouse, “Weekend Stimulates Sense of Community,” *Sophian*, vol. 22, no. 6, November 1, 1973, Student publications and student publications records, College Archives, CA-MS-01049, Smith College Special Collections.

²¹ Mary Beth Kenney, “Valley Centers for Women Expand to College Campuses,” *Sophian*, vol. 22, no. 6, Student publications and student publications records, College Archives, CA-MS-01049, Smith College Special Collections.

autonomy” since the beginning of the decade.²² While Smith’s mission was to educate women, the very foundations of the school upheld a perseverance of a rigid femininity that enforces the inferiority of women and permeated the culture on campus. During this time, two women English professors filed a complaint with the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, alleging their teaching contracts were not renewed due to their sex.²³ Even as the campus readied itself for the first female president, some older, male professors felt threatened by the growing tide of women in power.²⁴ The university classroom was “yet another stage in the process of her education,” as the lessons reinforced ideas regarding gender roles and femininity onto the students that media and previous teachers introduced in earlier years.²⁵ The outcome of the Women’s Weekends had proved to those interested in women’s liberation that they still had to fight to educate themselves and their peers on women’s issues at a historically women’s college.

By February 1974, the center was operating on the third floor of the Davis Student Center. Founding members worked to uphold the mission of building community at the Center by bridging gaps created by the housing system. They designed support groups meant to act as a refuge for a small group of students to meet and discuss issues personal to them. These were likely modeled after the consciousness raising (C-R) groups other women’s centers hosted that brought awareness to how personal problems have a political cause. C-R was a center of political life at Smith, as discussions prompted women to recognize the oppressions created by misogyny and created trust between those involved.²⁶ Due to the lack of women’s studies classes and certain students’ fervor for a women’s political spaces, it can be implied that women on campus did not understand how societal misogyny could have originated their difficulties. The implementation of support groups then created solidarity amongst Smith students, as they shared intimate details about their lives, while also building

²² Spain, *Constructive Feminism*, 12.

²³ *Smith College et al. v. Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination*, 380 N.E.2d 121 (Mass. 1978).

²⁴ Conway, *A Woman’s Education*, 43.

²⁵ Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966–1978* (W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1979), 134.

²⁶ Spain, *Constructive Feminism*, 52.

a foundation for future activism by encouraging participants to recognize the systemic injustices they all face.

Another early focus of the WRC was their publication “Invaluable Information: How to Get to Smith Before Smith Gets to You.” This resource guide sought to educate Smith students on services and programs they likely did not know were available to them through the school. It detailed how to move off-campus, design a major, start a club, and highlighted clubs and classes that focused on women. The center then established itself as a resource with its crucial publication aiming to “educat[e] those in close contact” or those in the Smith community.²⁷ Interestingly, the publications focused entirely on teaching their readers about Smith and did not connect their readers to the wider women’s liberation movement. It also empowered Smith students to take advantage of all the school has to offer. For example, the publication explained how to live off-campus or in a co-op despite these being less popular to encourage students to take control of their college experience and break from the possibly patronizing traditional housing system.

By focusing on spreading knowledge regarding systems within Smith College rather than greater society, “Invaluable Information” demonstrates both the WRC’s adherence and divergence from the prevailing thought within the feminist academy. In her notable 1974 essay, “On a Women-Center University,” poet and feminist thinker Adrienne Rich illustrates how universities, even those which are co-educational, reinforce the patriarchy due to its hierarchical nature and erasure of women’s contributions. A feminist university, however, would then allow female students “to discover and explore her root connection with *all women*.”²⁸ “Invaluable Information” built the foundations for these connections to occur as it highlighted ways in which students on campus had been building radical communities, such as through their non-traditional housing units or in their extra-curricular clubs. It also emphasized courses that focused on women’s histories and sociologies to encourage students

²⁷ Rebecca Hyman, “Speaking in the Circle: Women’s Center Publications and the Politics of Experience” in *University and College Women’s Centers: The Changing Landscape*, ed. Sharon L. Davie (Greenwood Press, 2002), 420.

²⁸ Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, 145.

to engage with their sex and view womanhood as a valid site of inquiry. The publication does not contribute to this cannon as it solely educates readers on knowledge relating to Smith. Their limited scope demonstrated a lack of connection to the actions and politics of the broader women's liberation movement. While other early efforts from the WRC centered around the dissemination of feminist knowledge, such as the building of a library of women's texts, the most public-facing effort, their publication, did not engage with politics, theory, or actions of those outside of the college. While it can still be praxis of their cause, as it empowered women to capitalize on their enrollment at Smith, it did not encourage radical action aligned with Rich's view of building a "consciously woman-centered universit[y]."²⁹

In 1975, the group restructured to have a central committee and working groups that included peer counseling gynecology, comprehensive exams, a gay group, booklets, radio station, and support groups. A subset of women involved with the center in the peer gynecology group received approval from President Conway to provide support to fellow students dealing with sexual health issues.³⁰ They worked with the Family Planning Council of Western Massachusetts to receive the foundational knowledge on how to guide their peers. The college saw this as one positive option for students who did not wish to discuss their personal lives with doctors at the Schacht Center for Health and Wellness. The working group could only provide counsel and referrals as the administration and school physicians discouraged students from dispensing pregnancy tests and medical advice to avoid liability. To boost participation, nurses had encouraged their patients to visit the peer counselors, but "students refused to go and discuss these matters with their 'peers.'"³¹ The service was not popular amongst Smith students, leading Health Services to decide to terminate the project. This is a microcosm of the center's initial lack of popularity as

²⁹ Ibid., 155.

³⁰ Correspondence between President Conway and WRC, Office of the President Jill Ker Conway Files, Box 233, College Archives, CA-MS-00071, Smith College Special Collections.

³¹ Correspondence between President Conway and WRC.

evidenced in op-eds by WRC members that implore their fellow students to interact with their programming, which they viewed as integral to a Smith women's education.³²

The largest reorganization occurred in 1976, when, in an attempt to secure more members, the WRC divorced itself from discussing lesbianism. This resulted in the formation of the Lesbian Alliance. An op-ed article published in the November 18, 1976 edition of *The Sophian* by an anonymous author, who is seemingly close to both groups, explained why the separation was “necessary:”

As a gesture of practicality, and in an attempt to define their own collective purpose, many lesbians on campus have formed the Lesbian Alliance, which was chartered this week at a meeting of house presidents. By forming such an alliance, gay women have officially dissociated themselves as a group, though fortunately not as individuals, from the WRC. Though it is benevolent of the gay students to sacrifice their own collective input into the WRC in order to encourage greater participation in it by other segments of the student population, it is a sad reflection on the tolerance and open-mindedness of the College community that such an action is deemed necessary.³³

The article illustrates how heterosexual members of the college did not want to work with the center due to preconceived notions that the group was solely for lesbians. While the Sophiasisters associated with the group since the first Women's Weekend, the center hoped to expand its reach outside of the gay community as it viewed itself as a resource for every woman on campus. In the larger women's liberation movement, “the initial response of many heterosexual feminists was to view lesbianism as a threat.”³⁴ Much like the national movement, many Smith women did not want to associate with lesbians due to their homophobia leading to the Lesbian Alliance becoming a separated group, despite the large overlap in membership.

The resource center continued its push for revitalization the following year by hiring a part-time staff member to work at the Center. The organization ultimately chose Anne

³² Loretta Smith, “Solidarity Needed,” *The Sophian*, vol. 21, no. 19, April 26, 1973, Student publications and student publications records, College Archives, CA-MS-01049, Smith College Special Collections.

³³ *The Sophian*, “Women's Resource Center Redefining Purpose,” vol. 25, no. 8, November 18, 1976, Student publications and student publications records, College Archives, CA-MS-01049, Smith College Special Collections.

³⁴ Beth Firestein, “Out of the Closet and into the Center: Women's Centers Serve Lesbian and Bisexual Women” in *University and College Women's Centers: The Changing Landscape*, ed. Sharon L. Davie (Greenwood Press, 2002), 230.

Dellenbaugh, a Smith alumnae who graduated the year before and would go on to co-found *Trivia*, a local feminist journal. She described her job as “overseeing things to make sure that nobody is duplicating anything” with her main role as “being a central leadership figure.”³⁵ Not only did having a worker solely dedicated to running the Center reduce redundancy but it provided support and structure for ideas that college students likely did not have the time to implement themselves. These ideas included the reorganization of the central committee into a collective and the offering of non-credit classes to teach life skills, such as auto mechanics. While Dellenbaugh’s work is throughout the archive of the Center, from her correspondence with administrators to the collaborations between the WRC and *Trivia*, it is unclear where her paycheck came from and when she stopped working at Smith, though it was within the decade. Based on WRC budgets from 1977–1979, it is clear that the WRC did not pay Dellenbaugh using their discretionary funds from the Student Government Association. It is likely that Dellenbaugh was the only person to ever take on this role at the Women’s Resource Center at Smith as there is no evidence of any other staff members.

That same year, the Smith’s Women’s Resource Center began participating in local Take Back the Night marches, which historian Estelle Freedman has suggested were “a collective method of reclaiming public life.”³⁶ They collaborated with feminists from Northampton to publicize and host these events that involved women marching through the town at dark to declare the streets as safe for all. By 1978, the center began to focus more on combatting domestic violence and sexual assault. Not only did they continue planning Take Back the Night rallies, but they also instituted workshops, a hotline, and student counseling service, which they mainly outsourced to UMass. Their focus on safety illustrates that colleges with women’s centers on campus often relied on them to handle most matters surrounding sexual assault including preventional education and supporting survivors.³⁷

³⁵ Amy Schancupp, “New Head Discusses Aspects of Women’s Resource Center,” *Sophian*, vol. 25, no. 21, April 28, 1977, Student publications and student publications records, College Archives, CA-MS-01049, Smith College Special Collections.

³⁶ Freedman, *No Turning Back*, 286.

³⁷ Claire Kaplan et al., “Violence Against Women: Women’s Centers’ Responses to Sexual Assault” in *University and College Women’s Centers: The Changing Landscape*, ed. Sharon L. Davie (Greenwood Press, 2002), 149.

The center hosted various self-defense courses throughout their years and partnered with the Valley Women's Martial Arts group to underscore the need for greater security for women in the area. While campus security and other departments addressed students' fears of violence through flyers and pamphlets, it was the Women's Resource Center that encouraged Smith students to learn how to protect themselves and how to heal from traumatic experiences.³⁸ The WRC provided a sense of safety through the dissemination of knowledge related to self-protection, perhaps more successfully than the staff-led initiatives that stoked fear by solely focusing on the violence itself.

Towards the end of the decade, the group focused heavily on maintaining an up-to-date library full of women's and queer studies texts for any Smith student to borrow. The library was integral to the mission of the center because it "transmitted to women a powerful legacy."³⁹ Acquiring these books required cultivating a relationship with some of the feminist bookshops downtown and in their hometowns. As a result of the popular lesbian separatist movement, Northampton has a rich history of women-centered businesses, with several lesbian bookstores and a woman-identified press running out of the town. Lesbian Gardens, a lesbian bookstore on Main Street, ran from 1974–1977.⁴⁰ However, the WRC seemed to have a closer relationship to Womonyre Books, which was in business from 1978–1982. Students involved in the Resource Center sold tickets to their concerts at the store and advertised the store's events in their WRC newsletter. The symbiotic relationship demonstrates not only the importance of feminist literature to the Center but also the importance of building relationships with local feminists. Working with and being a patron at nearby lesbian businesses showed that the commitment WRC had to enriching their members through the knowledge and literature that older women had acquired in town. This is how the WRC built their "diverse array of publications that spoke

³⁸ Sue Cobb, "Women's Center Raps on Rape," *Sophian*, vol. 23, no. 5, October 10, 1974, Student publications and student publications records, College Archives, CA-MS-01049, Smith College Special Collections.

³⁹ Rosovsky, "Libraries at the Center," 393.

⁴⁰ Kaymarion Raymond, "Lost Womyn's Spaces of Northampton, Massachusetts," *Lost Womyn's Spaces*, April 16, 2019, <https://lostwomynspace.blogspot.com/2019/04/lost-womyns-spaces-of-northampton.html>.

to multiple and overlapping groups.”⁴¹ The group collected dozens of books focusing on topics as varied as healing from childhood sexual abuse, biographies of influential women, feminist theory, and lesbian fiction from notable presses, such as Naiad or Firebrand Books. It is through these relationships to feminist booksellers and the books they purchased that women were able to receive a woman-centered education that they clearly craved.

By 1980, a working group from the Women’s Resource Center began to push for a women’s studies program. In February 1979, the organization had submitted a statement to the Committee on Educational Policy about instituting a Women’s Studies program of any form.⁴² Their first task was to collect papers students had written with a primary focus on women and compile a list of syllabi from classes that would fall under the women’s studies category. Both faculty and student activists did not see the creation of a Women’s Studies major at Smith to be feasible. Despite the popularity of classes centering on women and their perspectives, the curriculum committee seemed unlikely to create a department solely focused on gender. The newness of the field also likely played a part. As Robin Morgan has argued, “the difficulty of learning about the history of women in America is that, for the most part, it is an unwritten history.”⁴³ Smith did not view women centered inquiry as a valuable part of their education even as the school community continuously fought to learn their own gendered history.

Though they had the same goals, students and faculty did not seem to be on the same team. An internal letter between members of the Women’s Studies Taskforce revealed that “We [students and faculty] are not really going to work together. They will be consultants etc, etc, but although we’re working on the same issues, we won’t plan and plot together.”⁴⁴ The tension between the faculty and students is evidence that students viewed their professors as role models and trail blazers. In the letter, the unknown writer noted that she

⁴¹ Spain, *Constructive Feminism*, 86.

⁴² Statement to Committee on Educational Policy, Women’s Studies Task Force records, Box 3021.1, College Archives, CA-MS-00117, Smith College Special Collections.

⁴³ Robin Morgan, “Introduction: The Women’s Revolution,” in *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, ed. Robin Morgan (Vintage Books, 1970), 3.

⁴⁴ Internal Student Correspondence, Women’s Studies Task Force records.

“immediately lost her ability to speak coherently,” presumably due to her nervousness to approach these respected faculty members.⁴⁵ These faculty members decided to fight for the recognition of a separate women’s studies program on their own terms. In their book, *A Woman’s Place in the Academy*, Smith professors Marilyn Schuster and Susan Van Dyne recognized that they saw the need for a Women’s Studies program “partly through student prompting to build a more formal community.”⁴⁶ Their writing continued to diminish the students’ activism to advocate for the creation of this academic program. They wrote, “to accomplish these goals we developed a model that combines mechanisms for faculty development... with a curricular experiment.”⁴⁷ While the department would not have developed without faculty’s advocacy, dedication, and determination, the students in the WRC devoted themselves to fight for an education that represents their histories and futures. The WRC created a workshop designed to be during interterm in 1980 which demonstrated their commitment to instituting a Women’s Studies program as they put effort into creating a curriculum and recruiting students to their extra no-credit class. In their advertisements for the course, the WRC asked for faculty guidance and received some positive responses. At this time, the Women’s Studies Task Force had been continuing to compile student papers and syllabi for classes focused on women. The goal through these collections and the class was to illustrate interest in having a dedicated department for Women’s Studies by underscoring the work that students and faculty have already been doing. The WRC wanted to be a resource for students interested in studying women and gender more than the faculty wanted to be a resource for them as shown by their distance from student activism, although the professors did not seem reluctant to help when asked.

During the 1980s, the Women’s Resource Center hosted a variety of entertainment, specifically performances from lesbian musicians popular in the women’s music scene. In 1981, the WRC helped to host a Sweet Honey in the Rock concert along with women’s

⁴⁵ Internal Student Correspondence.

⁴⁶ Marilyn Schuster and Susan Van Dyne, eds., *A Woman’s Place in the Academy* (Rowman and Allanheld Publishers, 1985), 98.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

centers and Black student alliances at the other five colleges. The WRC also planned and hosted a June Millington concert and a Holly Near performance that next year. Women's music was evidently an important unifying force that worked to bring people into women's spaces who may not have understood the movement otherwise. Scholar Ann Cvetkovich wrote about the importance of music in the lesbian feminist movement in her book *An Archive of Feelings*, arguing that "the combined power of song, visuals, and live performance lends itself to the formation of a public culture that doesn't involve medical diagnoses or victims."⁴⁸ These events proved that the foundations of building community could be from pleasure and the arts, not just shared oppression. It would be integral to the movement to create moments of joy, not victimhood, in order to empower women and recognize their potential as cultural creators, not just consumers.

In 1983, the WRC worked with President Jill Ker Conway and the Career Development Office to host the Alternative Careers Conference.⁴⁹ One of the student conference organizers, Peri Hall, told *The Sophian* that the purpose of the event was learning about "integrating what's personally important to you with what you do for a living."⁵⁰ They hosted speakers from every field, from law to arts to business co-operatives. Some speakers required a fee, specifically Smith alums who traveled to campus to speak. Others, such as the owners of Womonfyre Books, agreed to participate for free. Overall, the conference meant to show feminist alternatives to typical post-graduation jobs. The WRC helped to plan this conference while publicizing outside political events such as those put on by the Democratic Socialists of America and socialist politicians. These events demonstrated how the students in the WRC had radical leftist politics that viewed class oppression as intertwined with sexism. Smith's feminists imagined a world outside of capitalism in order to envision a future without the patriarchy. While the WRC sponsored and publicized events that were

⁴⁸ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Duke University Press, 2003).

⁴⁹ Alternative Careers Conference Flyer, Women's Resource Center Records, Box 3021, College Archives, CA-MS-00108, Smith College Special Collections.

⁵⁰ Kathryn Calley, "Conference Explores Career Paths," *Sophian*, vol. 31, no. 37, April 14, 1983, Student publications and student publications records, College Archives, CA-MS-01049, Smith College Special Collections.

inherently leftist, their work on the Alternative Careers Conferences makes evident that they were willing to work with Smith, with capitalism, and with other oppressive institutions in order to advocate for change on any level, even a reformist one.

It is unknown how radical the students' involved politics were, as it depended on the members' personal ideologies. As shown in the organization's archive, there were debates over different political and economic systems found in notes highlighting the pros and cons of different types of economic systems. A 1983 *Sophian* article about Women's Week highlighted these diverse opinions by quoting a student who saw "the interdependence of patriarchy and capitalism as the root of wimmin's oppression."⁵¹ Overall, the Women's Resource Center held space for a wealth of ideas that explored how sexism became so pervasive, including economic ones, and discussed possible solutions on campus and beyond.

While planning their own events, the Women's Resource Center stood in solidarity with the Lesbian Alliance (LA). Not only did they advocate for the organization to receive funding during their time of tensions with Student Government, but they greatly overlapped in membership and hosted events together. The groups co-sponsored dances, lectures from speakers including Adrienne Rich, and educational workshops.⁵² An interview with an alumnae, Julia Dryfoos, who was active in both groups, revealed that the WRC was more politically focused. The Lesbian Alliance, on the other hand, viewed building community through entertainment as integral to their goals. LA dances were especially popular, seemingly marketed as an alternative to the party scenes within houses, with the Radical Debutante Ball being an example. While the WRC had their own parties, the group focused more on activist motivated actions and educating their peers on women's issues. Still, coalition building was integral to achieving their shared mission of creating a campus culture where everyone could feel empowered and safe. The organizations had to work

⁵¹ *The Sophian*, "Neither a Feminist Nor a Socialist Be," vol. 31, no. 28, February 24, 1983.

⁵² Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Alliance Records, Box 3016, College Archives, CA-MS-00112, Smith College Special Collections.

together, as their “ability to advance social justice and women’s equality within an institution of higher learning” depended on their cooperation with each other.⁵³ Therefore, it would make sense that the WRC would adamantly support the Lesbian Alliance, because of their own queerness, but also because of their shared belief in community.

In 1979, the Women’s Resource Center began publishing a feminist journal titled *Praxis*. The goal of the journal was to “articulate a feminist perspective at Smith College and to offer a forum for ideas and opinions not represented in existing campus publications.”⁵⁴ It was an example of feminist cultural creation as students involved with the Women’s Center wrote their own opinion pieces, poetry, and stories in alignment with their politics. By the mid-1980s, the journal began to solely focus on publishing poetry in a chapbook format. It is evident they viewed the structures of poetry to be radical as in the 1986 spring edition, editor Monica Pearl described how “in poetry then lies the opportunity to question the ideologies that perpetuate the inherent biases in our language.”⁵⁵ The fact that students wrote and designed this publication on top of their demanding schoolwork demonstrates that they viewed feminist culture production as important to the functions of the WRC and to their expression of self. They viewed their poetry as able to challenge the established patriarchal institutions of the written word and language. Their dedication to undermining their oppression through the arts shows their idealism but also their tenacity to push for change in every capacity.

In 1987, Audre Lorde, esteemed Black lesbian writer and thinker, came to Smith’s campus to speak at Women’s Week. Jennifer Dryfoos, a WRC coordinator, invited Lorde, who resided in her hometown in the American Virgin Islands. Lorde spoke at Wright Hall on the final day of the weekend, a venue much too small for the crowd she drew. Though a variety of organizations sponsored the event, including the Lesbian Alliance and the Black Students Alliance, Drooyfus recalled being the sole leader, which likely contributed to the

⁵³ Firestein, “Out of the Closet and into the Center,” 247.

⁵⁴ “Praxis” feminist publication, 1979–1983, Student publications and student publications records, College Archives, CA-MS-01049, Smith College Special Collections.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

unsuccessful nature of the event as she did not anticipate needing to change venues due to the number of attendees. Lorde's talk on campus illustrated how the Women's Resource Center tried to address issues of racism within their organization and on-campus since their inception but often failed to do more than just co-sponsoring events with the Black Students Alliance. While there are no records of any racism occurring within the center, scholars Elena DiLapi and Gloria Gay suggest that "it is likely the power arrangements within these women's centers mirror those of the broader society."⁵⁶ Pictures in the Women's Resource Center archives demonstrate this as the majority of the women involved were white, especially those in leadership positions. However, many events solely run by the resource center, such as Women's Week, focused on the dual oppression of women of color. During the spring of 1988, the Women's Week centered around events that heavily discussed race such as "Workshop for Latinas" and "Working Toward Change in a Racist Institution."⁵⁷ These BIPOC-centered events demonstrate that on some level the center recognized the need to ensure their events not only included everyone, but fought for the empowerment of all women.

By the end of the eighties, the WRC tackled debates and issues that feminist worldwide had been discussing. They held a talk by Andrea Dworkin, a known anti-pornography scholar, as students published several op-eds in *The Sophian* regarding their views on pornography and women's portrayals in media. It was then that the WRC became more than just a student-run organization, but a resource to bring influential and contemporary thinkers to the forefront of campus consciousness. The sheer number of events demonstrated the Student Government's willingness to fund talks from notable speakers that touched on issues that did not necessarily have a physical manifestation on Smith's campus. One demonstration of this was their focus on international women's issues. They invited various speakers from around the world to introduce Smith students to issues

⁵⁶ Elena DiLapi and Gloria Gay, "Women's Centers Responding to Racism" in *University and College Women's Centers: The Changing Landscape*, ed. Sharon L. Davie (Greenwood Press, 2002), 203.

⁵⁷ "Women's Weekend" 1988 Flyer, Women's Resource Center Records.

affecting women outside of the USA and to suggest ways in which Smith students can advocate for people outside of their communities.

By the mid-1990s, the WRC became a coalition that grouped every feminist-like group on campus instead of being a separate entity. Organizations under their umbrella included Student Labor Action Coalition, Feminists of Smith Unite, Smith People for Choice, Students Together Against Abusive Relationships, Rape Awareness, Survivors and Allies For Education on Childhood Sexual Incest, Queer Action Coalition, Peer Sexuality Educators, Associations of Smith Pagans, Hillel, and the Pro-Life Alliance. The inclusion of clubs that were antithetical to their mission, such as the Pro-Life Alliance, or only tangentially related, like Hillel, show how the space was beginning to wane in popularity. Most of these groups can and did function without the center. In the early 2000s, the space became even more inaccessible when the spatiality of campus shifted with the addition of the new Campus Center. Student life began to shift to the new building, meaning Davis Student Center became less central to students' lives on campus. Since the organizations within the center could easily exist without the physical presence of a Women's Resource Center, nor did they rely on many of the resources of the space, it seemed that interest in maintaining the WRC declined as people began to use the Campus Center more.

During this time, the importance of advocating for transgender rights within the feminist movement became more critical to the Smith community. The ideologies of second-wave feminism "constructed a culturally specific version of 'woman' as the subject of feminism" that often erased trans people and their relationship with the patriarchy.⁵⁸ Activism that relied on using women, or any spelling of the term, as a catch-all for those affected by gender oppression then became taboo since the 1970s women's liberation movement became associated with Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs). Separatist spaces and events, such as the Michigan's Womyn's Festival became synonymous with transphobia, as their exclusionary rules denied trans women entry to the music event.

⁵⁸ Enke, *Finding the Movement*, 10.

Activists that held genuine views of inclusion, such as queercore band Le Tigre, then had to distance themselves from the movement that served as the foundation for their work. The WRC co-hosted trans-centered events with the Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Alliance, their reliance on 1970s feminist symbols and language likely portrayed them as discriminatory and exclusionary.

The association between the second-wave feminist movement and TERFs likely led to the decline of gender-based organizing on Smith's campus. The Resource Center for Sexuality and Gender, which opened in March 2006, refused to engage with the legacy left by the Women's Resource Center. The debate over naming the center demonstrated the organizers' unwillingness to engage with history, as they decided to not name the center after alumna Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, a pioneer in the field of Women's and Queer Studies who co-wrote a foundational text in lesbian history with Madeline Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* (1993).⁵⁹ Instead of recognizing the foundational work done by previous Smith students since the inception of the college, the staff who created the center used an ahistorical name that also distanced itself from other, more popular buildings and centers on campus that are all named after influential alumni, faculty, or donors. Rather than recognize that the WRC and other minority-centered centers on campus had been successful because they began as a student-led initiative, faculty and staff from Residential Life and the Office of Student Engagement created the center with some input from LGBTQ student groups. This meant the center came from above not from the people that would be engaging with the services. Additionally, these staff did not follow the advice of their peers and had Residence Life staff the center, rather than hire separate staff members who might be more equipped to support queer students and host events at the center. Not only does this diverge from some of the successes of the WRC, but it differentiates Smith from the other Five College with active women's and LGBTQ centers who have workers dedicated to maintaining those spaces. Additionally, the lack of a staff member limited connections with

⁵⁹ Student Clubs and Organizations records, Box 3004.5, College Archives, CA-MS-00022, Smith College Special Collections.

community members and activism occurring in town, which helped to sustain and support the work of the WRC. Today, Hampshire College's Women's Center and Queer Action Center have a staff member solely dedicated to working at these spaces, preservation of their history through the work of student archivists, and frequently engage with organizations around the valley. Their success mirrors what went well with the WRC and highlights possible reasons for why the Smith Resource Center for Sexuality and Gender is under-utilized today.

Women's centers, both on and off college campuses, were an integral manifestation of second wave feminists' desires to raise consciousness through connecting their personal experiences to systemic misogyny and educating themselves on women's contributions to history. While they had been inspired by neighboring centers, the WRC was uniquely positioned to serve Smith students, from their publications' focus on navigating the bureaucracy of the school to their events catering towards college students already interested in women's studies. The ideas came directly from students, not staff, which meant they understood the needs of the student body and would have ensured the programming would be of interest to people on campus. Additionally, it allowed them to host fun events for students, such as dances and concerts, through partnerships with other organizations. Their willingness to work within, but not necessarily with, Smith is likely what allowed them to prosper for almost thirty years.

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