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"Pregnant Time": The Messianic Performativity of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo a7nd the 15-M Movement

Abstract

Scholars around the world have discussed the ontological possibilities of transnational social movements. This article addresses these possibilities, highlighting how two renowned social movements have (re)constructed time as an ontological category through their performative activities and publicly argued beliefs. Departing from Giorgio Agamben's work on messianic time, the article discusses how the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the Spanish 15-M Movement (also known as the Indignados), have tried to recover the allegedly lost subjectivity of their members through the refusal to act in keeping with linear conceptions of time. These movements have tried to seize time and retrieve political personhood through particular spatial and temporal performativities. Both movements, which emerged in particularly traumatic historical periods, embody a non-linear and messianic understanding of time. The article argues, however, that the movements have translated this non-linear

understanding of time through different messianic resources, namely, particular temporal and spatial performativities.

Keywords:
Giorgio Agamben, Madres de Plaza de Mayo, messianism, time, 15-M Movement

Messianism and International Political Subjectivity

The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben is one of the most important thinkers in contemporary political theory. His work builds on the ideas of post-structuralist political theorists such as Foucault and Benjamin (Prozorov 2009; Passavant 2007). The renown of Agamben's work has to do, however, with how he reformulates the legacies of these thinkers (frequently departing from them) and uses this reformulation to frame what he understands to be the effects of the contemporary biopolitical sovereign order (Agamben 1998; Prozorov 2009; Passavant 2007). In this article, two of the main concepts elaborated by Agamben hold particular significance: messianic time and messianic power.

Agamben's messianic project is meant to juxtapose two different readings of time: chronological time and messianic time. Chronological time turns individuals into mere spectators of history, "spectators [...] continually missing themselves," whereas messianic time, "the time we ourselves are," should give back to individuals the fruition of time itself (Agamben 2005: 68).

Agamben defines messianic time as *ho nun kairos*, the time of the present (2005: 61). Messianic time is the time we have left to make time stop or, in other words, the time we have to give meaning to time itself (2005: 72). This is why Agamben compares his understanding of messianic time with Gustave Guillaume's concept of operational time, defined as a non-chronological construction of time that empowers human beings to achieve their own definition of time. Agamben argues that, as an operational time, messianic time allows individuals to achieve their own representation of time and behave as if all fixed identities had been revoked. It is what Agamben, drawing on Saint Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, designates as the "as not," meaning that the messianic attitude aspires to revoke all vocations (Agamben 2005: 23). Consequently, in following a messianic attitude, we should act as if we have been stripped of every means of identification. In First Corinthians, Paul writes,

> But I say this, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess;

> and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away. (1 Cor. 7:29–31, NASB)

Agamben's interpretation of messianic time constructs a new paradigm for understanding personhood and offers new possibilities for framing political subjectivity. According to Agamben, chronological time closes individual subjectivity into fixed and aprioristic identities. In keeping with Foucault's conceptualization of biopolitical governmentality, he argues individual subjectivity is constructed in relation to sovereign power (Foucault 2007; Edkins 2008: 3). Biopolitical sovereignties consecrate the sources of their power by reifying the classic Aristotelian belief in virtue as habit (Negri 2012) and that individuals should conform to the roles society assigns them (Agamben 2005: 22–23). It is through messianic time that individuals can revoke the workings of biopolitical sovereignties, reformulating their own identities and the way they act towards those identities.

Messianic time is, in fact, the time that remains for human beings to "freely use […] worldly conditions" (Ojakangas 2010: 99). The free use of time and worldly conditions allows individuals to render sovereign power and its instruments inoperative. According to Agamben, rendering inoperative means profaning a concept or instrument of power, the law, for instance, returning it to the free use of human beings and removing its existence from the realm of the sacred (Agamben 2007). It also means freeing human beings from every kind of will that, as Negri has suggested, threatens to become institutionalized, effective, and actual (Negri 2012). Consequently, rendering power inoperative can be considered a way of deactivating the state apparatus. In this context, Agamben defines messianic time as ensuring the inversion of the articulation between power and weakness (Agamben 2005: 97).

Following Agamben, power *dispositifs* may be rendered inoperative and reduced to a frail position. Conversely, power may also be achieved through weakness, *dunamis en astheneia teleitai* (Agamben 2005: 97). Agamben expands on Paul's assertion in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians that "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10, NASB). Being powerful by being weak is not a contradiction when we realize that privation and weakness are themselves forms of power. Agamben reifies Paul's claim that messianism constitutes the inversion of what traditionally has been understood by actual power and institutionalized will. Messianic power achieves its status through weakness, and only through weakness can messianic power accomplish its effects (Agamben 2005: 98). Not only is messianic power realized through weakness but it is also empowered to render all forms of institutionalized power inoperative, because it is through messianic power that all forms of authority are deactivated. This deactivation should not be understood as destruction, but rather as the accomplishment of something better. Mes-

sianic deactivation, Agamben argues, does not simply abolish the apparatus of power, but sets the foundations for a better present (Agamben 2005: 99).

How can messianic power be understood as fundamental to the (re) construction of political subjectivity? The messianic inversion of the linkage between power and weakness disavows traditional conceptions of social status. In this context, messianic power should be understood in association with messianic time (Edkins 2008). Whereas messianic time deactivates all forms of social classification through the working of the "as not," messianic power renders useless the effects that derive from the establishment of institutionalized forms of power.

A new subjectivity can, therefore, emerge from the articulation between messianic power and messianic time. This new form of subjectivity opens a window of opportunity for reformulating how communities construct their politics of memory (Edkins 2008). In fact, it is the messianic possibility of seizing time that empowers human beings to claim what Agamben calls the "exigency to remain unforgettable." This demand empowers the recuperation of lost subjectivities. As Agamben argues, "The exigency of the lost does not entail being remembered and commemorated; rather, it entails remaining in us and with us as forgotten, and in this way and only in this way, remaining unforgettable" (Agamben 2005: 39–40).

The key operation in retrieving lost subjectivities is celebration, since celebration contains a performative dimension that imposes a presence. According to Agamben, history contains forces that strive to erase particular events and subjects from public memory. The performative dimension of celebration imposes the presence of a lost subject who otherwise would be erased from the annals of history. As Agamben writes, "Its persistence determines the status of all knowledge and understanding." The retrieval of the subjectivities of those who were lost depends on the collective and individual "capacity to remain faithful to that which having perpetually been forgotten, must remain unforgettable." In this sense, messianism carries the promise of redemption that annuls all vocations and all pre-established subjectivities (Agamben 2005: 40–41).

The articulation between messianic time and messianic power is fundamental to understanding how political subjectivity can be reformulated by new global actors (Edkins 2003; Edkins 2008). The political subjectivity of social movements is highly dependent upon discursive resources. Accord to Della Porta and Diani, social movements must be able to establish links between "different occurrences, private and public, located at different points in time and space which are relevant to their experience[,] weaving them into broader encompassing narratives" (2006: 22). Consequently, individual and collective members of social movements have to perceive themselves as participants of a broader process of social change. The construction of a public narrative is a movement's opportunity not only to assert its identity as a political actor but also to in-

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tertwine its past, present, and future into a coherent story. A politics of time is, therefore, essential.

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo: Temporal Performativity and the Recuperation of Political Subjectivity

The retrieval of human subjectivity and human potentiality is particularly important when trauma arises from state-sponsored terror. The case of Argentina has been paradigmatic. The crimes committed during its military dictatorship left the country with severe traumatic memories that have not faded away with the development of restorative justice procedures.

The depth of the Argentinian trauma is so significant it has become embedded in the country's cultural performances. Cultural performances constitute one of the best ways to build memory repositories about the social and human consequences of Argentine's Dirty War. As Jelin has argued, "the introduction of symbolism in the dynamics of recall through art, images (scarfs, silhouettes, masks, posters), or fiction comes out of the need for traumatic experiences to be somehow elaborated, brought to a close" (1994: 52). In this context, it is noteworthy that Argentina's investigation into the fates of the 8,960 individuals considered officially disappeared was presided over by writer Ernesto Sábato. Sábato's "slow descent into hell," as he called the work of the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (CONADEP), was followed by several other Argentinian novelists who produced narratives about the 1976–1983 Dirty War, that is, about the traumatic wounds left by the absence of the *desaparecidos* in Argentine society ("Price of Love" 2011). It was with the goal of addressing those wounds that a group of fourteen mothers of *desaparecidos* began gathering and demanding to learn the fates of their children in 1977. They were subsequently joined by hundreds of other women, and a new social movement emerged (Safa 1990).

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo movement played a fundamental role in overthrowing the military dictatorship that governed Argentina from 1976 to 1983. During the military regime, the Madres always refused any association with political parties or feminist movements, vehemently claiming their aim was not to defend ideologies but to uphold life. Their goals were to ensure the return of their children and punish those involved in what they considered a violation of the sanctity of their family lives (Safa 1990: 362). During the military dictatorship, the movement maintained its status as a weak "counter-public" (Fraser 1990).

After the demise of the military regime, however, the movement was beset by internal rifts. A particular faction within the group favored transforming the movement into a strong counter-public (in Fraser's sense)

through the establishment of alliances with political parties. As Safa has argued, the conversion of the movement's political mobilization into institutional representation was one of the most contentious questions for the Madres, leading to a decline in its public support (Safa 1990: 362). In fact, disagreements over political alignment strategies, in particular, following the country's democratization, were common among Argentine human rights groups. It was those divergences that led to movement's split in 1986 (Jelin 1994: 43).

Discussions about the movement's political alignment strategies were mirrored in the polemics surrounding its discursive practices, that is, the use of specific words in public statements and publications as well as the content of public slogans. The slogans *Aparición con vida* ("Bring them back alive") and *Castigo a todos los culpables* ("Punishment for all responsible") and the term *detenido-desaparecido* ("detained-disappeared") were particularly contentious within the movement (Jelin 1994: 43).

The activism of the Madres during the military dictatorship was embedded in a complex, wider network of political mobilization that included heterogeneous groups, e.g., organizations representing the interests of those directly affected by the atrocities of the Dirty War, e.g., the Madres and, later, the Asociación Civil Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo), as well as the Familiares de Presos y Desaparecidos por Razones Políticas (Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared for Political Reasons), and more broadly focused human rights organizations such as the Movimiento Ecuménico por los Derechos Humanos (Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights) and the Jewish Movement for Human Rights (Jelin 1994: 41).

The logics and action strategies of these groups were diverse, as were their immediate goals, which ranged from international exposure of the atrocities committed by the regime to mobilizing solidarity with its victims and their families. According to Jelin, this differentiation of resistance mechanisms and goals was fundamental for understanding the different alignment strategies these different groups pursued during Argentina's transition to democracy (Jelin 1994: 41). The organizations representing the interests of those directly affected by the violence of the military regime, namely, the Madres and the Abuelas, tended to be more aggressive and less concerned with strategic considerations. Consequently, these type of organizations, Jelin writes, "had a more expressive role, insistently denouncing violations in any and every public space possible, often putting them much more at personal risk" (1994: 43).

As I have already mentioned, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo played a fundamental role in overthrowing the military dictatorship that governed Argentina from 1976 to 1983. The performative dimension of the activism developed by the movement relied mostly on the mobilization of symbolic resources (Bosco 2006). The movement's name is paradigmatic. The Plaza de Mayo is the seat of the state authority in Argentina and the

focus of political life in Buenos Aires, and it was there that a group of Argentinian mothers carrying white kerchiefs and pictures of their disappeared children marched, demanding to know what had happened to them. Despite being dismissed by the Argentine ruling elite as psychologically disturbed and even subversive, the Madres were able to develop a consistent media policy and establish a network of domestic and international activism that sustained the movement's influence over time. Due to the establishment of a resistance strategy that gained widespread international recognition, the movement was able to construct its own space of activism within South American civil society organizations. In fact, one of the most important signs of the Madres' success as a social movement was that their resistance tactics were adopted by like-minded organizations in other Latin American countries, such as Brazil, El Salvador, and Chile (Safa 1990: 362).

The forms of public resistance employed by the Madres always included an important performative dimension, that is, the weekly gatherings and the disruption of public governmental initiatives. The division of the Madres into two separate movements, it has been argued, was also a matter of performative resources. Collective public performances have had a dual function, since they have not only maintained solidarity among the movement's participants but have also ensured the maintenance of boundaries between the groups forming the movement (Bosco 2006: 392).

The public performances of the Madres were conceived and engineered as a way of recuperating their own subjectivity as mothers with a public right to grief and, above all, that of their disappeared children. The white headscarves worn by the Madres from the Línea Fundadora group at their public gatherings, which they used as a form of mutual identification, were embroidered with the names of their sons and daughters (Bosco 2006: 392). The goal was to remember their loved ones as bearers of personal subjectivity, as people with individual paths and identities. That explains why the Madres from Línea Fundadora publicly displayed their memories of their children by carrying their pictures in banners and on their clothing.

The way the Association Madres de Plaza de Mayo tried to recuperate the political subjectivity of their children was different but equally compelling. They chose not to carry their children's pictures in public gatherings and not to wear headscarves with the names of the disappeared embroidered on them. Instead, as Bosco points out, the Madres represented by the Association made the truly biopolitical argument that their sons and daughters were not dead but still alive within and through their own bodies: the disappearance of their sons and daughters had made the Madres permanently pregnant with their children, who were still alive in their wombs. The disappeared were thus publicly represented as individuals whose biopolitical subjectivity depended on the public performance and political engagement of their mothers. Conversely, the presence of

the children within their mothers' wombs was represented as supplying the energy that ensured the resilience of the Madres' activism (Bosco 2006: 392–393). As Bosco writes, "[T]hese Madres see themselves as *embodying* the activism that their 'revolutionary' sons and daughters had started" (2006: 393).

This biopolitical argument is also significant since it transforms the bodies of the Madres into specific sites of resistance. Their bodies were re-imagined in order to recuperate the lost subjectivity of their sons and daughters (Bosco 2006: 393). In the case of the Madres from Línea Fundadora, their bodies were used as a site for displaying their children's pictures and modes of identification. In the case of the Association, their sons and daughters were represented as inhabiting the bodies of their mothers, as if they could continue their resistance through them (Bosco 2006: 394). In this context, the biopolitical condition of the disappeared as "ontically missing" subjectivities (Edkins 2008: 2) assumes a particular significance. As Edkins argues,

> [O]n the whole, though, the missing are different from the dead. They are not there, they cannot be found, but they are not yet confirmed as dead. They have no corpses, no death certificates (for the most part), and time for those who are their relatives or friends is in some sense suspended: life *cannot* go on. The missing are not alive, but nor are they dead. (Edkins 2008: 3)

The mechanisms devised by the two Madres groups to construct a politics of trauma centered on the commemoration and remembrance of their children's lives, mirroring what Edkins has called "trauma times," since by choosing to transform their bodies into sites of resistance the Madres have asserted the impossibility of closure and comfortable quietness (Edkins 2003; Edkins 2008: 6; on the politics of trauma, see Bell 2006 and Caruth 1996). Consequently, opting for resistance allowed the Madres to reveal the fragilities of institutionalized power. In the process, the Madres were able to challenge the linear time adopted by the state's narrative, demonstrating how the "intrusion of trauma time" can challenge the linearity of the power apparatus (Edkins 2008: 6).

The biopolitical argument of "perpetual pregnancy" (Bosco 2006) clearly illustrates how traumatic events can only be experienced "when the past, which has not yet 'taken place,' intrudes into the present and demands attention" (Edkins 2008: 6). It must be taken into account, in terms of the argument used by the Madres, that the biological and symbolical deaths of their sons and daughters never took place, leading to the permanent intrusion of the past—the children's resistance activities—into the present, as marked by the Madres' political engagement.

Consistently with the political engagement that particularly defines the Association (and which had led to the division of the initial movement

into two separate groups), the biopolitical argument, as described above, was pushed further in order to include other strands of excluded groups in the public discourse of the Madres. The leaders of the Association argued that not only were their sons and daughters alive within their bodies, but they were also alive inside unemployed people and children in need (Bosco 2006: 393).

Ontologically, the activism of the Madres was situated between the symbolical and the biological deaths of their children. In the case of the Madres from the Association, both symbolical and biological deaths were denied through the argument that the ontologically missing condition of their children had resulted in the perpetual pregnancy of the Madres. As for Línea Fundadora, it was mainly the symbolical deaths of their children that were denied, since the activism and the quest undertaken by the Madres maintained their children's presence within the Argentine social and symbolical order (Bosco 2006; Edkins 2008: 3).

The 15-M Movement: Temporal Performativity and the Recuperation of Political Subjectivity

On May 15, 2011, thousands of people protested in many Spanish cities. Some observers consider the 15-M Movement, also known as the Indignados, the most interesting political development in Spain since Franco's death and the beginning of the democratization process. Beas (2011) has characterized it as a "hybrid and novel experiment of online and offline activism that has steered clear of the traditional and weary avenues of political engagement."

The articulation between the 15-M Movement and messianic time is more subtle but equally as compelling as that of the Madres. The 15-M Movement has developed a particular temporal performativity linked with its innovative forms of political mobilization (Gordillo 2011). The movement has occupied time by reconfiguring vertical forms of accountability, that is, by refusing to conform to traditional civil society forms of engagement (Graeber 2011).

To understand the articulation between the 15-M Movement and messianic time, we need to complement Agamben's approach with the insights of Walter Benjamin on the importance of a new understanding of time for the retrieval of political subjectivity.

Agamben has been deeply influenced by Benjamin's perspectives on the importance of time in social and political transformation. According to Benjamin, the retrieval of political subjectivity has to do with repossessing the past and, above all, with refusing to accept a linear conception of history, which embodies what Benjamin calls "homogeneous, empty time" (2003: 395). The messianic occupation of time is, therefore, fundamental: "Every age must strive anew to wrest tradition away from the

conformism that is working to overpower it," Benjamin writes (391). He argues that a linear concept of history embodies an orientation towards the future that annuls the messianic possibilities of the present. Accordingly, he argues that the working class should not be reduced to the condition of "redeemer of future generations," but should instead act as emancipated heirs (394). The refusal to accept any kind of orientation towards the future leads Benjamin to highlight the importance of the "now-time" or *Jetztzeit* (395).

In order to celebrate the now-time, time's linearity has to be broken. As Benjamin writes, "What characterizes revolutionary classes at their moment of action is the awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode" (395). By critically disturbing the continuum of history, human beings may achieve the "messianic arrest of happening" (*Stillstellung*), which Benjamin defines as a "revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past" (396). In Benjamin's view, therefore, the retrieval of political subjectivity has to do with occupying political time by shattering the traditional mechanisms of political action, which for Benjamin embody "empty" conceptions of time.

The 15-M Movement's public mobilization strategies were clearly intended to retrieve the political subjectivity of its participants (¡Democracia Real YA! 2011). What was at stake was the reconfiguration of vertical forms of accountability. Traditional politics is based on the premise that the demands citizens make to the state should "conform to a certain style in order to be heard" (Thomassen and Prentoulis 2012). The 15-M Movement denied this traditional premise, demonstrating that the language of politics can be transformed and that citizens should count as equal voices within the political process. The goal was to historically invert the occupation of political time by corporate and elite interests and (re)affirm popular empowerment (Gordillo 2011).

In the case of the 15-M Movement, the ontological (re)assertion of political agency has, in particular, been articulated with the ability to sustain the performance of occupying public space over time (Gordillo 2011). Through the occupation of public space, the 15-M Movement achieves the occupation of political time. The performative dimension of such acts of resistance is fundamental, since it underpins the articulation between different conceptions of time and space (Nyong'o 2012: 139), that is, linear and messianic conceptions of time and space. The 15-M Movement's temporal performativity is, therefore, of undeniable ontological significance, and it has also been present in the construction of its policy agenda (Žižek 2011; Nyong'o 2012).

As a social movement, the Indignados have been frequently accused of pursuing an unclear political agenda with no concrete demands and policy proposals (Kaldor et al. 2012; Žižek 2011). In fact, the demand to endorse concrete policy proposals that can be implemented in a specific, pre-determined time frame constitutes a meta-narrative whose intention is to foreclose change within the universe of social movements (Graeber

2011). Frequently considered heirs to the anti-globalization movements of the late 1990s, current social movements have deemed it vital to build a narrative that could assert their distinctive nature vis-à-vis their historical predecessors (Klein 2011). Interestingly, such distinctiveness has been achieved in part through an argument based on the articulation between time and space.

Traditional anti-globalization movements displayed the tendency to select specific summits as targets. The transient nature of those summits condemned organized contestation to an equally transitory and non-permanent quality (Klein 2011). The performative character of the 15-M Movement was, on the contrary, conceived and planned in order to escape this eventual transitory and non-permanent condition (Kaldor et al. 2012). Two main factors illustrate this choice.

First, the 15-M Movement chose a fixed agenda of contestation. This option was attuned with one of the major characteristics of current social movements, namely, the development of collective conflictual action (Della Porta and Diani 2006: 21). Spanish 15-M protesters clearly established a linkage among traditional politics, corporate and financial power, and corruption (Kaldor et al. 2012:12).

Second, in keeping with other current social movements, the movement did not set an end date for its mobilization and has organized its daily activities in order to acquire a permanent temporal character. The most important innovation of the 15-M Movement has, in fact, been to establish a link among three main elements: the organization of public encampments, the non-definition of an end point for the occupation, and the fostering of physical and moral spaces for public discussion and dialogue (Kaldor et al. 2012:14).

More importantly, the Indignados have kept their political agenda sufficiently open in order to foreclose rigid, linear temporal rationalities (Kaldor et al. 2012). These rationalities are translated into the argument that social movements should adopt a practical policy agenda with a set of claims that can be realized within a specific time frame (Elliot 2011). It is interesting to note how the notion of practicality is easily intertwined with linear conceptions of time. Conceptions of practicality and linear time constitute serious obstacles to widening the possibilities for social movements. They limit the opportunities for change within the universe of civic contestation itself by forcing social movements to behave according to pre-determined criteria, and by leading them into recognizing the power of established opponents (Graeber 2011). By refusing rigid linear temporal rationalities, the 15-M Movement assumes that its "now-time" equals its "messianic arrest," which allows the movement to act as the emancipated heir of social movements. Civic engagement is freed from the conformism that has overwhelmed it in recent decades (Žižek 2011).

The way that the 15-M Movement, along with other, similar social movements, has defied the internalized limits to civic engagement, reified

by social movements throughout the twentieth century, therefore seems fundamental. Traditional social movements internalized a modus operandi centered on the objective pursuit of ends on behalf of a common good that was based on a public interest defined from conventional perspectives. The objective pursuit of goals made it possible to set a fixed time frame for civic mobilization, which was "forced" to start and end at pre-determined moments (Brucato 2011). The Indignados challenged this linear understanding of time-space mobilization not only by occupying public spaces but also by refusing to envisage an end result for their civic engagement.

Consequently, unlike more conventional social movements, the "narrative arc" of social movements like 15-M and Occupy Wall Street is clearly innovative, since it approaches time not as a constraint but as a possibility, and clearly defies western society's perceptions of what is politically possible (Rushkoff 2011). Commenting on the connections between the 15-M Movement and Occupy Wall Street, a Spanish protester in New York nicely captured the new rationale behind these new forms of social protest: "[I]t's most important to consider this as a process rather than something with definite goals and demands. We're trying to create a productive means to channel this feeling of discontent" (Tahroor 2011).

As I have already stated, one of the main traits of messianic time is that it allows individuals to achieve their own representation of time. It is what Agamben designates as the "as not," which means that the messianic attitude allows individuals to act as if they had been liberated from every means of identification as well from the power apparatus that imposes those means of identification (Agamben 2005: 34–36). The performative nature of the public actions undertaken by the Indignados fully embodies the potentialities inscribed not only in the construction of an autonomous representation of time but also in a defiance of the power apparatus based on the "as not." Certain current civic movements that have chosen to occupy public spaces as a resistance tactic believe laws regulating public protests should not exist and protesters should not have to ask for permission to occupy those spaces. As David Graeber writes, "[O]ne reason for the much-discussed refusal to issue demands is because issuing demands means recognizing the legitimacy—or at least, the power—of those of whom the demands are made." The difference between protest and direct action is that the latter implies acting as if the prevailing and "existing structures of power [do] not even exist." In his words, "Direct action is, ultimately, the defiant insistence on acting as if one is already free" (Graeber 2011).

To achieve a sustainable representation of time, 15-M protesters, like Occupy Wall Street and Occupy LSE protesters, have successfully argued that capitalism has not produced the "best possible world" and that alternatives are needed. The capitalist narrative is, in fact, based on a linear conception of time that ties economic liberalism to human progress (Low-

enstein 2011). To deny the pervasive adoption of a linear conception of time means, as Žižek has wisely argued, avoiding translating efforts at mobilization into a set of concrete demands. It is, therefore, necessary to maintain the condition of a "pregnant vacuum" that can only be filled with something new and that can be subtracted from the realist field of negotiations and concrete proposals (Žižek 2011).

Conclusion

I have discussed how the performative dimension of two particular social movements, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the 15-M Movement, has depended on the (re)construction of time as an ontological category. Agamben's interpretation of the concept of messianic time is a theoretical perspective from which we can inquire about the discursive practices and possibilities available to political actors when they defy the classic distribution of political subjectivity, put forward their own interpretations of time, and transform weakness into strength. The clear performative dimension of both social movements corresponds to the celebration of the (re)emergence of lost subjects, the *desaparecidos* and the citizens of today's democracies. I have complicated the discussion of Agamben's notion of messianic time by arguing that the two social movements discussed here have used different messianic ontological resources in their effort to recover their lost political subjectivity. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo have disrupted linear time conceptions through a temporal performativity that has reconstituted the symbolical political agency of the disappeared. The 15-M Movement embodies a non-linear and messianic understanding of time, because it elaborates a temporal performativity that equates the occupation of time itself with the refusal to develop a time-bound political agenda.

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