

***Los topos* and Kirchner's Death. Queering affiliations in mourning/ *Los Topos* y la muerte de Néstor Kirchner: filiaciones *queer* en el duelo¹**

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Resumen:

En el contexto de revisión del pasado reciente que tiene lugar en la Argentina contemporánea, propongo un análisis de *Los topos* (2008), la novela de Félix Bruzzone, hijo de militantes asesinados durante la dictadura militar. Contra la tradición victimizante que reduce el monopolio de la memoria y el dolor a los 'directamente afectados' por el terrorismo de estado, Bruzzone desarma la idea de herencia sanguínea, sustrayéndola de sus víctimas directas. *Los topos* cuestiona la idea de familia heteronormativa construida por las organizaciones de las víctimas proponiendo un desplazamiento *queer* que 'transviste' la figura de los descendientes. La novela puede leerse como respuesta tanto al humor negro que anima el modelo de activismo desarrollado por la agrupación *HIJOS* a mediados de los 90s, como a las políticas de duelo inauguradas por el gobierno de Néstor Kirchner en 2003 que consagran la figura del militante-víctima. *Los topos* subvierte la oficialización de la memoria como obligación de estado sugiriendo un enlace no normativo entre parentesco, pérdida, y herencia política. Por último, sugiero que la novela prefigura la radicalización del discurso político que antecede a la muerte de Kirchner en Octubre de 2010, y muestra las filiaciones no sanguíneas que emergen del duelo.

¹ Si bien la ponencia original es en inglés, la presentación durante el IV Seminario Internacional Políticas de la Memoria se realizará en castellano. Este ensayo es una versión reducida del capítulo final de mi tesis de doctorado en Queen Mary, Drama Department, University of London (fecha de entrega: Noviembre 2011).

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Los topos and Kirchner's Death. Queering affiliations in mourning/ Los Topos y la muerte de Néstor Kirchner: filiaciones queer en el duelo³

When democracy was restored in 1983, the network of organizations created by the victims of state terrorism assumed the form of a peculiar family. The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo (*Madres*), the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo (*Abuelas*), the Relatives (*Familiares*), and more recently, the Children (*HIJOS*), and the Siblings (*Herman@s*) of the 'disappeared' evoked their biological ties to the missing to make their claims for justice. This particular overlap between kinship titles and groups of victims has framed the local trauma in terms of a bloodline assembly of victims. In the wake of loss, the so-called the 'relatives' associations have configured what I call a 'wounded family'.⁴

Many scholars have called attention to this familial inscription of the violent past.⁵ This 'biological' foundation of the demands of justice has deeply informed not only the memory struggles in the country, but also the human rights concerns, which ultimately have tended to be processed as a family issue. The unwritten rule of the post-dictatorship stipulates that only those who were 'directly affected' by the military repression are entitled to assume the rights of remembering. As Jelin argues, "'truth" came to be equated with testimony of those "directly affected" first and foremost in the voices of blood relatives of the "disappeared"' (Jelin, 2008: 177).

In this paper I will show how the language of the family prevents from understanding the transmission of trauma beyond bloodline inscriptions. In the need of developing new critical frameworks to respond to the local experience of loss, I will attempt to provide alternative vocabularies to account for the affective lines of transmission that have already permeated the wider society

By looking at *Los topos* (2008), a short novel written by Félix Bruzzone, an Argentine writer who has both parents disappeared, I will show how the experience of loss led to the emergence of new forms of attachments that go beyond familial settings. I contend that *Los topos* contests the politics of mourning that prevailed during the aftermath of violence. I make the case that the novel decouples the idea of heritage from a bloodline chain of victims and relatives, by suggesting a more fluid entanglement among kinship, loss, and political heritage. Ultimately, I suggest that Bruzzone's piece prefigured the affective environment that surrounded Nestor Kirchner's death in October 2010.

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⁴ In 1996, the Children of the Disappeared founded *HIJOS*, 'Hijos por la Igualdad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio' (Children for Identity and Justice, against Forgetting and Silence). The emergence of the organisation Herman@s (The Siblings) seems to confirm the productivity of the familial frame by staging a kinship titles as the motor of the political activism.

⁵ Diana Taylor, Elizabeth Jelin, Judith Filc, Gabriela Nouzeilles, Ana Longoni, and Brenda Werth, among others.

A new era of memory and *happiness*

During the period inaugurated by Kirchner's government in 2003, the particular shape of the national trauma was fostered into an official frame.⁶ For the first time a government embraced the position of the victims to assume mourning as a national commitment. During his inaugural speech, Kirchner declared: 'We are the sons and daughters of the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo'.⁷ By including himself within the cast of the 'wounded family', the former president presented himself as part of the lineage inaugurated by violence. In doing so, he implicitly contested the monopoly of blood from an official side. The official strategy revealed the extent to which the right of remembering could not be restricted to those 'directly affected' by violence. From an unattended side, the biological normativity within the human rights' field was twisted.

While appropriating for himself the identity of the 'son', Kirchner responded to the bio-politics of memory by showing the extent to which heritage does not rely entirely on blood but rather is part of a political struggle. The presidential gesture helped in constituting an alternative system of kinship beyond blood.

After the politics of forgiveness embraced by previous democratic governments, Kirchner's administration also provided the political impulse to overrule the laws that granted immunity to the military. From 2006, massive trials started prosecuting those responsible for the human rights' violations of the dictatorship.⁸ The 24th of March, anniversary of the 1976 military coup, was transformed into a bank holiday and national day of remembering. In 2004, the official act to commemorate the coup took place in the emblematic navy school and former detention camp, the *Escuela Mecánica de la Armada* (ESMA). Kirchner announced that it was to be turned into a 'space of memory', thereby recovering the infamous place for civil society. That day Kirchner addressed his speech to his 'brothers' and 'sisters', and congratulated the Mothers, the Grandmothers, the Relatives, and the Children for their 'model of struggle' (Jelin, 2008: 195). Yet again, the ex-president subscribed to a line of heritage that was much more political than biological; more related to loss than to blood.

The discourse of blood remained as a sort of *happy narrative*, the new moral order advocated by the relatives' association, and strategically championed by the national state.⁹ In her critique of the notion of happiness Ahmed claims, 'to be bound to happiness is to be bound by what has already been established as good' (Ahmed, 2010: 133). During Kirchner's administration the very idea of memory was turned into a 'happy object', which enacted the figure of the political good. In this unprecedented context, the idea of memory was transformed into a 'national duty'.

Although this governmental shift involved an important change in terms of progressive politics, it also implied an uncomfortable position for the relatives' association that had always fought outside the state. Above and beyond, not all was about happiness in this period. In 2008, another stage in the process of mourning

⁶ Néstor Kirchner held the presidency from December 2003 to December 2007 when his wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner replaced him up to the present day.

⁷ It was the 25th of September 2003 during Kirchner's first speech in the United Nations General Assembly (UN), <http://undiavolvimos.blogspot.com> (last accessed 13th of December 2010).

⁸ In 2005, the Argentine Supreme Court declared the nullity of the laws of impunity, and prosecutions were allowed once again.

⁹ To develop the concept of 'happy narrative' to challenge conventional human right's discourses in Argentina I am indebted to Sara Ahmed's recent critique of happiness. See Sara Ahmed (2010) *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press).

began. New voices started contesting the biological normativity supported by the associations of the victims, challenging the attachments prescribed by blood. These new narratives staged less literal ways of being touched by violence, at the time that they established breaks and interruptions in the official duty of memory. Borrowing again from Ahmed's vocabulary, I suggest that these practices and discourses can be conceived as 'killjoys', since they managed to get 'in the way of an organic solidarity' (Ahmed, 2010: 213).

Coming from the side of the 'directly affected', I argue that Bruzzone's novel embodies that challenge. His book can be conceived as a killjoy narrative. It complicates the narratives of victimisation while contesting the biological solidarity built around the figure of the 'wounded family'. *Los topos* rewrites the story of a son of the disappeared while providing a queer, insurgent and ironic version of the narrative of blood.

Making fun of the 'wounded family'

Bruzzone's parents were both ERP activists who were kidnapped and murdered during the state repression. He grew up with his grandparents in Buenos Aires' suburbs. Although he made the traditional journey through human rights' organizations to uncover the story of his parents, he was never a political activist. In fact, he remained faithful to an independent artistic perspective. Despite the writer was never part of *HIJOS*, his production was highly influenced by the group's atmosphere. In fact, his work could be perceived as the unhappy response to the fact of being the 'son'. Today, Bruzzone lives in Buenos Aires' suburbs with his wife and son. He cleans swimming pools in a wealthy neighborhood for a living, and on a daily basis he records this experience in a personal blog.¹⁰ Despite the apparent isolation, his recognition as a writer has been expanding internationally. If all his production has focused obsessively on the drama of the descendants, *Los topos* marks a surprising tuning point in traditional repertoires of trauma.

Los topos draws from Bruzzone's personal experience. As himself, the central character has lost both parents during the military repression and lives with his grandparents in Buenos Aires' suburbs. He does not, however, seem to be identified with the identity of the 'son'. He follows with loose skepticism his grandmother's anxieties around his parents' disappearance. The elderly matriarch, named *Lela*, which reads as 'silly' in Spanish, is convinced that her missing daughter gave birth to a second child while she was held captive at ESMA. When her husband dies, Lela moves opposite the infamous detention center to be able to command a daily-basis search of her second grandchild.

An odd sense of humour echoes this very preliminary scene. Lela's character seems to be endorsing an irreverent recitation of the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, the group of women searching for the babies stolen during the dictatorship. Considering that the novel takes pace in contemporary times, Lela's shouts in front of ESMA appear as a sort of eccentric, untimely performance, which does not follow any historical consistency. In fact, since the late 70s the Grandmothers no longer look for babies, but for youngsters who are now in their early thirties and are unlikely to be at ESMA. Furthermore, when the building has now been recovered for the civil society.

¹⁰ The name of Bruzzone's blog is 'El que limpia las piletas' (The one who cleans swimming pools') See <http://www.barrefondo.blogspot.com/> (last accessed, January 31, 2011).

Sooner or later, the protagonist starts dating Romina, a sweet woman in her early twenties who decides to join *HIJOS* as a devoted gesture of commitment towards the narrator's past. She also contends that in the group the protagonist will find the companionship he needs. But her insistence does not convince him. The main character does not agree with the 'escraches', the novel form of activism developed by the descendants during the 90s. He says:

The *escraches*, for instance, were for me a form of revenge, law taken into one's own hand, something very much of my interest but perhaps because of cowardice, or idiocy, or intelligence I've been unable to put it into practice. Sometimes, I even thought of borrowing Lela's car [...], sell it, buy a Falcon [the type of cars that were used by the military while conducting the kidnaps], and gather some friends to go out kidnapping military personnel (Bruzzone, 2008: 17).¹¹

The distortion is flagrant. During the late 90s, the *escraches* worked as strong gesture of moral condemnation in absence of legal justice. The loud and colourful parades, which targeted the military in their own places, far from offering a spectacle of sorrow and pain they displayed the intensity and the energy of a strange celebration. The massive demonstrations included carnival dances, graffiti and theatrical performances. Not only were the young activists involved but also the regular neighbours who, on discovering that they had been living so close to a military repressor, often adopted a leading role in the initiative. Nonetheless, Bruzzone reintroduces an ostensibly ironic version of this form of activism. In the passage quoted above, the *escraches* are reduced to a mere impulse of revenge, which is deliberately turned back on the perpetrators. Ironically, the operation is conducted via the same means that the military forces used to apply during the dictatorship: the Falcon, the green cars that still remain as the most ostensible symbol of the state's repression.

The same subversive procedure could be witnessed in relation to blood filiations. The protagonist condemns his girlfriend's decision of joining *HIJOS* while arguing that there were no real victims in her family. As confirming the blood hierarchies championed by the associations of the victims, the narrator contends that Romina's family did not even know what 'the issue of the disappeared was about' (Bruzzone, 2008: 16). *Los topos* addresses with cruel irony the question of who bears the legitimacy of remembering in contemporary Argentina. It highlights the apparent contradiction of being part of *HIJOS* without bearing the status of the victim. By mocking Romina's feeling of empathy with the descendants, the novel crosses the taboo line drawn by the association of the relatives who are proud of considering themselves as the only victims of violence. This position queers the way in which the relatives' associations have thought about themselves, mostly as conforming to a sort of biological community of victims. While at some moments, the narrator pretends to be a purist of the biological heritage, at others, he mischievously proposes an expansion of this biological structure of familial ties. For instance, while referring to Ludo, a girl who was also *HIJOS*' activist and whose aunt disappeared in Cordoba (a province in north of the country), the narrator suggests:

¹¹ I have translated all the quotes from Bruzzone's novel that are included in this article.

It would have been great that she joined Romina, so as they could both found *SOBRINOS* [Nephews & Nieces], *NUERAS* [Daughters in Law] of the disappeared (Bruzzone: Noble, 18).

By including novel branches within the family tree of victims, Bruzzone makes fun of the obsession with kinship titles that lies at the core of the association of the relatives. While mocking this trend, the novel becomes closer to an intergenerational critique of what remains untouched in contemporary Argentina. *Los topos* teases the feelings of property that the relatives have in relation to the missing, and portrays them as a caricaturized self-help club of victims. In doing so, it challenges not only the idea of victimisation as the main model to engage with loss, but also the legitimacy of remembering dominated by a bloodline lineage of victims. Following on from this, it proposes an expanded heritage that could be potentially multiplied into the open society. *Los topos* emerges as a sharp and excruciating caricature of an expanded family, which from now on not only includes *Mothers*, *Grandmothers*, *Children*, and *Siblings*, but also *Nieces and Nephews*, and even *Daughters in Law* of the disappeared.

In the name of the son

In December 2007 Cristina Fernández de Kirchner took office as the new president. Her administration involved a second period in the process of revision of the past. This new stage opened the conditions of possibility for new discourses to emerge. In this context, *Los topos* works as a sort of prolepsis that prefigured the rhetorical violence that will capture the public sphere after 2008.

Sooner or later, the relationship of the protagonist with Romina comes to an end. After paying her abortion, he starts looking for sex in the red district of Buenos Aires and eventually meets Maira, a transgender prostitute. The encounter leads to 'the greatest and more beautiful love'.¹² Bruzzone plays a surprising card: he insinuates that Maira, the new girlfriend, could be the protagonist's biological brother. As uncanny as it sounds, the narrator suggest that his brand-new transsexual partner could his illegitimate missing sibling who was stolen from his mother while she was captive at ESMA. Maira might be the latchkey kid that Lela, the protagonist's grandmother, was looking for from the beginning of the story.

How might this impertinent shift in the drama of the disappeared be analysed? When I interviewed Félix Bruzzone in April 2009 in Buenos Aires, I was curious about the inclusion of Maira in the novel. Her character especially fascinated me, not only because it was the first queer figure to appear in the author's work, but also, and, more importantly, because to my knowledge it was the first time that a queer reference was explicitly applied to address the dictatorship's heritage. This is what he told me:

In the mind of my main character there is this situation about his potential brother who might have been born at ESMA. Maira appears like a fantasy at the time he is breaking up with his girlfriend. I think he becomes attracted to Maira because he sees in these girls a problem of identity similar to the one he has. He sees in the transsexual world almost a cliché of people with identity

¹² Bruzzone, 34.

problems. This is the sort of identification that the main character establishes. However, I never thought of this story as a way of talking about transsexuals. Rather, I thought of it as a means to talk about the disappeared.¹³

At that moment, Bruzzone's words had the status of a revelation: at least from the author's perspective, the notion of queerness that underpinned the novel was less related to a sexual role, than to a methodological form deployed to subvert the legacy left by the dictatorship. The operation appeared particularly significant within a context in which the Kirchners' administration overrated the power of blood at the same time that they appropriated the position of the victims as their own political lineage. Maira's figure came to suggest a new perspective to rethink this paradox. In fact, her figure could be perceived as a subversive recitation of the figure of the son, a novel operation to unseat the figure of the offspring of the disappeared.

My argument here is two fold. On the one hand, I argue that Maria's transsexual character offers a fruitful perspective to dismantle the ongoing images of the new generations of survivors. This operation could be considered as a response to the politics of memory that put in practice during the last democratic administrations, which tend to conceive the offspring of the disappeared as figure asphyxiated under the duty of memory. While displacing the organic solidarity of the 'wounded family', *Los topos* gives room to an alternative form of politics in response to loss.

In fact, Bruzzone's novel captures the political atmosphere that circulated during Fernández de Kirchner's government. It also addresses a new situation that troubles *HIJOS'* organisation. While during the late '90s, the *escraches* provided the descendants with a way of coping with the absence of legal justice, from 2006 onwards, massive trials started prosecuting those responsible for human rights' violations.¹⁴ This change in the legal situation also opened up a process of civil revision, which progressively led to the questioning of conventional narratives of memory. During the re-opening of the trials, *HIJOS* assumed for the first time the role of prosecutor, acquiring a leading position in the legal process. However, in comparison to the effervescence of the '90s, the number of activists decreased by 75 per cent in 2010. How to explain this shift? Kirchner called many youngsters to work for the official dependencies, placing the activists in the role of double agents, and confronting their previous radicalism with the contingencies of being part of the state. Precisely in this awkward period, *Los topos* emerges to show its sardonic teeth. The novel addresses this new discomfort mainly through a big laughter. In doing so, it depicts a drama of inverted filiations in which the experience of a whole generation becomes transformed into an astonishing, scornful, and terrifying family performance.

Queering the repertoire of the victims

During the interview Bruzzone referred to his previous book, *76* (2007), a collection of short stories inspired by stories of the descendants. There, he offered a thought-provoking comparison. He argued that his fictional characters, and also the figures of the relatives' associations usually reminded him of a series of 'abandoned

¹³ This quote comes from an interview that I have conducted with Bruzzone on April 28 2009 in Buenos Aires (my translation).

¹⁴ In 2005, the Supreme Court declared the nullity of the laws of impunity, and prosecutions were allowed once again. Today, 1424 military personnel are involved in cases in all the country (information provided by the Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales, CELS).

buses', which he used to contemplate at a creepy depot near his neighborhood. He told me this:

In my stories, the children of the disappeared have these abandoned buses in their heads; something that was once useful but no longer is [...]. They do not want to vindicate anything. They are looking for something that is prior to any claim. They seek an origin, an identity, they need to know who their parents were, but that prevents them from building a regular family.¹⁵

Bruzzone reads the imaginary of the relatives' associations as intrinsically melancholic. For him, they have their minds are captured by creepy buses, which prevent them from getting over their loss. Moreover, the image of the abandoned buses functions as a way of declaring that the beloved objects, the missing parents, remain within a sort of vegetative state. As defiant as it sounds, this image makes room the descendants to process the transmission of trauma in an alternative way. It also makes space for unconventional feelings of kinship that unsettle the table of the 'wounded family'.

My parents turned out to be a lot of people: my grandma, my uncles and aunts, my cousins, my friends; people that appear in life [...] One is always searching for strange filiations. Perhaps something similar happens in literature.¹⁶

In this way, Bruzzone shows how in his case the experience of loss allowed him to conceive his affective environment as a family of choice. These alternative attachments and forms of intimacy are also present in *Los topos*. In the novel the operations of displacement performed in the realm of kinship intersect in Maira's figure. Her transsexual persona enacts a disturbing way of upsetting the biological narratives championed by the association of the victims. It also dismantles the heterosexual figure of the family constructed by the relatives. In this vein, Maira emerges as the troublemaker of the 'wounded family', a killjoy of their moments of comfort. In this sense, she embodies the notion of queerness. Through her figure, Bruzzone's novel deploys a distorted paradigm of performance of the descendants' drama. Not only as a character but also as a method. Once again, humour emerges as the affective tool to contest the power of blood.

A new space in the present

Halfway through, *Los topos'* plot spins out. Maira has been the victim of an operation similar to the kidnappings that took place during the dictatorship, and there are no traces of her. The queer girlfriend (and perhaps the narrator's abducted brother) becomes a 'neo-disappeared', an intriguing condition for a democratic country.¹⁷ To cope with the new loss, the protagonist moves to the south of the country, where he becomes involved with 'The German'/'El Alemán', a conspicuous character

¹⁵ My translation.

¹⁶ See Quintín, 'Uno a uno. *Sueño con medusas*, de Félix Bruzzone', <http://www.lalectoraprovisoria.com.ar/?p=2550> (last accessed February 21, 2011).

¹⁷ The episode seems to recall the fate of Julio López's case, a retired bricklayer who disappeared after declaring in trial against the perpetrator Miguel Etchecolatz in September 2006.

specialized in murdering homosexuals. As embodying the worst of fantasies, the end of the novel finds the narrator becoming a transgender woman and embracing the serial killer who might have murdered Maira and also his own parents.

How can we analyze this abject ending? What sort of illegitimate arrangements could be established among the figure of son, a transgender neo-disappeared and a serial killer? Far from any kind of whim, Bruzzone's story deploys a queer artifact that can help us to consider the transmission of trauma from an alternative perspective.

In her well-known research on cultural memory in the Americas, Diana Taylor argues that *HIJOS* developed a kind of performance that revisited their parents' struggle. For her, the post dictatorship scene is embedded in what she calls a 'DNA performance', a biological and self-same repetitive paradigm of public presentation based on a bloodline connection of biological kinship (Taylor, 2003: 175). For Taylor, the new generation of activists remained inevitably captured by the authority of the past.

Los topos allows us to explore this generational drama through a novel perspective. While Taylor conceives the idea of transmission as attached to the notion of sameness, Bruzzone presents this possibility as tied to the idea of difference. He suggests a recurrent line of recitations of the notion of the familial that involves a surprising inversion of terms.

Maira introduces a queer version of the figure of the son of the disappeared. When the protagonist falls in love with Maira the novel brings together the anxieties that surround the figure of the transsexual and the opacity of the figure of the son. It sets a queer system of kinship between them by suggesting that both characters could be biological siblings. They are both injured characters, they both enact the figure of the victim. Through these unconventional intersections, the book proposes a queer reenactment of biological kinship that shows the extent to which grief always implies a process of transformation and becoming other. As Butler argues, 'grief contains the possibility of apprehending a mode of disposition that is fundamental to who I am' (Butler, 2004: 28). Bruzzone invites us to explore this form of dispossession through two disparate modes of embodying the figure of injured son.

While inviting to read the descendants' drama alongside the question of sexual filiations, the novel also touches on the problem of falsified identities. It could be argued that the anxieties raised in relation to the children of the disappeared are not completely dissimilar to those evoked by the offspring of non-heterosexual parents. The drama of growing up under falsified identities while sharing home-spaces with their appropriators (who are, further, usually accomplices in their parents' murder) already installs a queer notion of kinship within the offspring of the missing. *Los topos* reads this conflict of contested heritages while envisioning alternatives ties within the shadowy real of kinship. It invites the reader to figure out unconventional forms of intimacies to address a violent past, while detecting 'hybrid regions of legitimacy and illegitimacy that have no clear names', as Butler would say (Butler, 2000: 112).

Los topos' final scene finds the protagonist living with *El Alemán* (The German). He has undergone a process of plastic surgery that suggests an attempt to swap places with Maira, the new enactment of the figure of the missing. What is finally at stake here is the fantasy of having one's own experiences 'evacuated' by the previous generation, an issue that, as Taylor reminds us of, has always been at the core of the descendants' drama. However, *Los topos* suggests another possibility to read this problem. The progressive mutation of the protagonist into a transgendered

woman points out to the recent fluidity of the figure of the son that corresponds to the political atmosphere during the late Fernández de Kirchner's period. In fact, while suggesting a parallel between the figure of the son and those of the queer identities, Bruzzone's novel liberates the descendants from their fatal destiny.

If during the late 90s, *HIJOS*' activism managed to reverse the experience of shame helping the offspring to assume themselves as part of an injured lineage, *Los topos* comes to suggest that the identity of the son is not rigid and fixed forever. Rather, it is subjected to constant mutations, a process of becoming other that can reach extreme possibilities. In this line, *Los topos* proposes a fictional inscription of the descendants' drama alongside feelings of kinship that go beyond the limits regulated by the law. As a result, the name of the perpetrator becomes also travestied: he is the *alemán-papá* (the 'German-Father'), as if murderer and lover had become one. In this poignant parody of the Stockholm syndrome, the main character is not only in love with his executer but also he is captured by a past that exceeds his own story.

Los topos finishes with both potential children of the disappeared transformed into a brand-new transsexual couple. We find the *Narrator-Son* sharing a romantic venue with the *German-Father* near a gorgeous Patagonian lake.¹⁸ The last scene seems to suggest that past and present share a common destiny, as if Maira, the missing parents, and the German-Father, had grotesquely become one.

What Maira wanted, what mum wanted, and also dad in his way, was a new world, world new, new man, blissful men because of the arrival and the promise of return, the white sisters, the purest daughters of the snow, of the most intense coldness that becomes a night of love (Bruzzone, 2008: 185).

This hallucinatory monologue introduces the horrifying possibility that the future could be nothing but a repetition of the present, and that the descendants of the disappeared may want exactly the same as their missing parents wanted. This possibility suggests that the story of the offspring could involve a sort of 'reconciliation of want' aligning two generations under an exceptional reunited desire (Ahmed, 2010: 149). This is actually the missing line that is part of Taylor's idea of a DNA performance. It could be argued that Bruzzone's book does nothing but put into practices this biological normativity. Thereby, it works as if the missing parents and their queer descendants were gathered together as part of an impossible biological family of victims and perpetrators. While staging this extreme version, *Los topos* teases the bloodline confidence that sticks at the core of Taylor's perspective. Under the dark light of the novel, the performance of the descendants reveals its moment of failure. *Los topos*' fatal ending stages the worst-case scenario just to break the spell. It does what the discourses of the victims cannot: it demonstrates how humor can queer traditional repertoires of memory. Bruzzone queers the repertoires of memory that is usually at stake in contemporary Argentina. It shows the extent to which the legitimacy of blood cannot be taken for granted. Ultimately, and against Taylor's predictions, *Los topos* shows how the new generations can manage to find their own space in the present, while breaking away from past experiences of violence.

¹⁸ The italics are mine.

Family, politics, and a new grief

In October 2010, I arrived in Buenos Aires to present at the previous edition of the International Seminar the Politics of Memory that was scheduled to take place at the cultural centre at ESMA by the end of the month.¹⁹ I was surprised by the tension and the strong sense of polarization that captured the public sphere. There seemed to be no space in-between, nor room for critique. Even my most reluctant colleagues were obliged to take sides, as if the only possible position were to be for or against the current government. The political arena was conceived in terms of war.²⁰

I argue that these feelings of vulnerability and hate that emerged during this outbreak of violence were foreshadowed by Bruzzone's work. Despite of the fact that *Los topos* was published in 2008, it still had the ability to foresee the extent to which the disputes around the different versions of the past had become the zone intersection of dramatic tensions. Precisely, Bruzzone's novel has the ability to address the radicalization of the society in seemingly irreconcilable factions during Fernández Kirchner's government that came to be read in terms of the dictatorship's heritage.

By the end of October 2010 the spiral of violence permeated the whole of society. This binary logic had its final expression in a clash where Mariano Ferreyra, a 23-year old student and activist, was killed. The resonances were vast. However, just one week later, a new episode changed completely the political scenario: the former president Kirchner died of a heart attack. The shocking news worked as a test to calibrate the feelings of kinship that have emerged from loss.

'Orphans once again'

The 27th of October was already a peculiar day. It was declared bank holiday since the National Population Census was taking place, and people were obliged to stay at home. By 10am the news of the death of the leader was on all around the media. While detractors of the government furtively celebrated indoors, thousands of people gathered at the Plaza de Mayo. They cried in the streets, brought flowers, and home-made souvenirs. Thousands of youngsters with no previous political background occupied the central square to farewell the leader who had made them re-discover a pleasure for politics, as they said.

For the memorial service, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner stood for long hours next to her husband's coffin that was set up in the Casa Rosada. The official building remained opened for the vigil, and a multitude queued the whole night to offer condolences to the president. 'Be strong, Cristina', was the favourite chant. During the highly theatrical procession, the widow received the support of hundreds of mourners who have become, somehow, and extended family in grief.

The relatives' associations occupied the foreground of the demonstrations. The *Mothers* brought their scarves to cover Kirchner's grave. 'He was also our son,' they said recalling the leader's inaugural speech. 'Orphans once again', bewailed

¹⁹ The III Seminario Internacional Políticas de la Memoria 'Recordando a Walter Benjamin: Justicia, Historia y Verdad. Escrituras de la Memoria', which was originally scheduled for October 28-30 2010, finally took place from October 30th to November 1st because of the official period of national mourning.

²⁰ Although the national polarisation started in 2008, resulting from the decision of Fernández de Kirchner's administration to implement an export tax on agricultural goods. In fact, during the passing of the Law 125, the Vice-president of the country, Julio Cleto Cobos, voted against the official proposal, splitting the government in two irreconcilable sections. See Brenda Werth, *Theatre, Performance, and Memory Politics in Argentina*, (New York: Palgrave, 2010), 205.

Hijos. 'He was our second father', they claimed. Juan Cabandié, one of the abducted children who in 2004 had been recovered by the Grandmothers, cried on the radio incapable of pronouncing a word. His inconsolable weeping spoke about this helpless feeling of orphanage that circulated within important sectors of the society.

In the wake of Kirchner's death a new political lineage gained the streets, one in which the feelings of kinship did not respond to traditional settings. Rather, it recalled the affiliations built as a response to violence. The community that was at stake during those intense days recalled an expanded family in loss. The death of the leader made visible an alternative system of kinship that resonated in a new common grief.

During the days of political sorrow, Kirchner's inaugural speech acquired an expanded political significance: 'I am the son of the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza the Mayo', he had said. The resonances of the statement vibrated in the wake of loss. They made visible to what extent the feelings of kinship can exceed the borders of a biological family. To some extent, the former president's appropriation of the position of the son was prefigured by Bruzzone's novel. *Los topos* proleptically addresses the death of the leader through a main displacement: it addresses the struggles of the descendants to give room to a more fluid sense of political belonging. The figure of Maira, the transgender *son* of the disappeared creates inaugurates an expanded line of heritage; arguably, we can all be sons and daughter of the missing. This is precisely the process of collective transformation that is enacted by *Los topos*: a queer system of kinship that challenges a bloodline ownership of the experience of loss. As a result, the novel draws a field of pure resistance, a site of 'unco-opted by normativity', which enlightens a novel scenario to conceive Argentina's trauma (Buler, 2009: 106).

By subverting the biological inscription of heritage, Bruzzone's novel invites to imagine the non-normative forms of attachments that had emerged out from a common loss. It challenges narratives of victimhood while presenting an alternative sense of being together in the aftermath of trauma. In its dark, extreme language, *Los topos* book offers the opportunity to envision zones that are not already explored by the extended society: a new conception of politics that emerges attached to non-normative modes of love, support, and care. The *happy narrative* of the 'wounded family' lies as a corpse on stage. We can hear a sickening laughter coming from the background. The moles are giggling again.

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