

Mourning, Activism and Queer Desires.

***Ni una Menos* and *Las hijas del fuego* (Albertina Carri, 2018) in Argentina's Memory Backlash¹**

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Argentina's neoconservative backlash, initiated in December 2015, has rather paradoxically been marked by an unprecedented entanglement between ongoing memory struggles and a recent feminist awakening. This article proposes a provocative reading of this entwining. First, it traces the queer reworking of dictatorship trauma, as it occurred during the Kirchnerist administrations (2003-2015). Second, it explores how the post-2015 cycle nurtured a feminist irruption that contested long-term forms of patriarchy. Drawing upon the impact of *Ni una menos* on the younger generations, it argues that the feminist movement has transitioned from victimisation to joy. Finally, I bring into analysis *Las hijas del fuego* (2018), a lesbian-porn fictional film directed by Albertina Carri, which can be read as an expression of a novel amalgamation of disappearance, sexuality and politics. The spirit of contagion irradiated by the film sheds light on the so-called "revolution of the daughters" already taking place in the streets.

Keywords: Argentina, Dictatorship, Feminism, *Ni una Menos*, Carri.

On October 19, 2016, during the so-called first International Women's Strike in history, more than 250,000 women took to the streets of Buenos Aires in Argentina. Ignoring the torrential rain, they demanded the "end of patriarchy". As the demonstrations multiplied in the interior of the country and across Latin America, recognized local theorists and intellectuals announced the end of "CEOs feminism", a reference to the hierarchical nature of the women's movements. They predicted, instead, a festive spilling over of "feminisms of all colours" (Peker, October 26, 2016).²

[Photo 1 about here]

The episode was beckoned in local media outlets as a reverberation of the first national icons of women and mourning, the Argentine Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and their famous rounds in the square that is the political heart of Buenos Aires. As the Argentinean journalist Horacio Verbitsky, president of the human rights NGO the Centre for Legal and Social Studies, argued, “It was possible to witness the birth of a phenomenon that, like the Mothers of Playa de Mayo, or October 17, would transform the entire political system” (October 23, 2016, *Página 12*).³ Some months later, on May 10, 2017, the Plaza de Mayo would be covered in white: 50,000 anonymous protesters, followed by human rights and political organisations, adopted the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo’s traditional scarves to make them flap in unison in a crowded square. The spontaneous demonstration evoked the 1983 *Siluetazo*, the artistic intervention that signposted the final stages of the military dictatorship, at which thousands of ad-hoc activists lay down in the Plaza de Mayo so that their bodies could be traced and transformed into full-scale posters that evoked the haunting presence of the disappeared. The silhouettes were left out for the whole night as a theatrical reenactment of loss, confronting viewers with the “voiceless screams” of those vanished by the military (Longoni, 2007). But in 2017 the adoption of the Mothers’ scarves was also a specific response to an extreme provocation: the Supreme Court’s attempt to reduce the sentence of Luis Muiño, a military repressor convicted of crimes against humanity.⁴ With the ruling threatening to benefit other repressors, the public took to the streets.

Only six months divided both demonstrations. To the backdrop of businessman Mauricio Macri’s new conservative administration, which began in December 2015, an unprecedented encounter was beginning to emerge: two experiences of mourning were enhancing and strengthening each other. In these pages I set out a combined reading of this entanglement. Far from a “local exception”, as suggested by Verbitsky (*Página 12*, October 23, 2016), I argue that the cross-fertilization of these differential fields was part of a dense history, in which local and global tensions became intertwined in a moment of failure. I examine how contemporary resonances of the military dictatorship (1976-1983) challenged biological narratives, modifying ways of being together in the wake of mourning. I explore how the conditions of constraint and coercion inaugurated by the neo-conservatism that began in December 2015 nurtured and sedimented a feminist

irruption, mostly attached to the growing impact of the collective *Ni una Menos*, a tide that challenged the hidden patriarchal nature of the political sphere as never before. Moreover, I show how through this process of cross-fertilization, memory, disappearance and femicide got entangled in a new stage of mourning.

In the final sections of the article, I analyse the film *Las hijas del fuego* (2018) by Albertina Carri, a pornographic fictional piece directed by the daughter of a disappeared couple and also a leading figure of the New Argentinean Cinema. The film, which has been described as “intense, poetic, pornographic and a militant work” (Keslassy, December 20, 2018 *Variety*), offers a depiction of gender and sexuality that, I suggest, is expressive of the wider affective rearrangements of kinship taking place in Argentina. Ultimately, I argue that *Las hijas del fuego* proposes an exceptional amalgamation between disappearance and mourning, pleasure and extended filiations.

Cross-fertilization of mourning

The process of cross-fertilization between dissimilar mourning experiences currently at stake in Argentina requires further investigation, particularly in terms of how certain affective affairs became visible during the Kirchner administrations (2003-2015). Without underestimating the pain of those “directly affected” by state terrorism, a particular, perhaps paradoxical, transformation occurred during that period. As I have argued elsewhere, mourning allowed for envisioning new ideas of community (See Sosa, 2014). During that controversial period, witnesses not directly affected by loss managed to participate - and in some sense also adopt - the experience of grief. Suggesting that they have the potential to generate alternative forms of “being with others”, I have conceived these affiliations as *queer* (Sosa, 2014). I now am interested in rethinking the affiliations that emerged in the shadow of grief in the post-2015 period. Since, as I see it, the dissemination of mourning across large sectors of civil society ultimately nurtured the seeds of current feminist irruptions.

The period 2003-2015 has often been associated with a narrative of hatred in which society split into irreconcilable sectors. These political-affective disagreements were defined and instigated by the media as a crack: ‘*la grieta*’. But the period also allowed a new fiction of the common to emerge, largely shaped around the alternative modes of affiliation that were a response to the experience of mourning. During the

Kirchner era the question of sovereignty over the Malvinas/Falkland Islands, the trials against the perpetrators of crimes committed during the dictatorship, and the legal framework related to social equality (including a universal child allowance), all occupied a privileged place in the political agenda (Blejmar and Sosa, 2017: 11). The governments also extended rights for LGBTQ communities: laws over same-sex marriage, assisted fertilization and gender identity were all passed, challenging long-standing patriarchal and heteronormative political structures. The conservative government that came to power in December 2015 tried to overturn what I suggest calling a “queer fissure”. But the latter’s force escaped traditional memory politics by breaking out through feminist non-normative overflows.

In fact, the unexpected force of *Ni una menos*, a feminist collective denouncing gender violence, which emerged at the end of the Kirchnerist period, is indicative of this trend. The inaugural event of the group took place on March 26, 2015, when a group of journalists, artists and writers gathered at the *Museo de la Lengua* for what they called a “Marathon of Poetry”.⁵ The crossovers and displacements between the mourning narratives associated with the dictatorial past and an emerging anti-patriarchal feminist movement brought new urgencies and intensities to the post-2015 cycle. By then, the feminist tide had become the most powerful social actor in the region, managing to take by assault the so-called austerity coveted by conservative retraction (Palmeiro, 2018).

An expanded feeling of kinship

The violence of the military dictatorship prompted, paradoxically, an expanded feeling of kinship. In the wake of loss, mothers, grandmothers, children, siblings, and other relatives of the disappeared initially evoked their biological ties to the missing as part of their demand for justice. However, these same kin organizations unfolded in their interior forms of union and affection that distanced them from classical family models. This constellation of non-normative intimacies emerged as a response to conditions of disappearance, torture and death imposed by state violence.

If for decades the network of associations of relatives of the victims, which I have characterized as the lineage of the “wounded family” (Sosa, 2014), managed to retain the experience of mourning in the hands of the “directly affected”, during the Kirchner administrations the domiciliation of mourning began to be displaced. The 2003-2015 administrations witnessed a blood performance where mourning exceeded

classical family configurations. The rhetoric of Néstor Kirchner's and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's administrations contributed to this displacement. In his inaugural speech Kirchner said: "We are the sons and daughters of the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo" (*Pais*, 2012). Self-invested under the figure of the son, the former president showed how the lineage of loss not only involved direct victims but could also be inhabited by those who adopted mourning as a personal commitment. While suggesting a queer family in mourning, the performance of grief became divorced from its biological basis. Later, the conservative backlash also witnessed the emergence of a new group, *Historias Desobedientes*, a collective formed by sons, daughters and relatives of military repressors who ostensibly wanted to de-identify from their fathers. This new branch of the "wounded family" not only enlarged the queer family in mourning during the post 2015 cycle but also showed unprecedented ways in which blood could be subverted.

During the 2003-2015 period, contemporaries of the descendants of the disappeared found fertile ground for recreating their own traumatic legacies. The emerging and often audacious narratives deployed forms of humour and irony, which sometimes came into tension with the traditional "privileges" of blood. These narratives also envision a more fluid arrangement between gender, politics and sexuality. At the beginning of the period, for instance, the blond wigs that dominated the screen at the end of *Los Rubios* (2003), the watershed documentary film directed by Albertina Carri, gave life to a non-sanguine community that endorsed an extended family in mourning. The piece, which was extremely inspirational both for the filmmaker's contemporaries and the new generations, staged a provocative memory as a way of accounting for the unattainable traces of her disappeared parents.⁶ *Los topos* (2008), the groundbreaking autobiographical fiction of Félix Bruzzone, introduced the transvestite as a main inheritor of the dictatorial period. In the fictional memoir *Cómo enterrar a un padre desaparecido* (2012), Sebastián Hacher, a seemingly 'non-affected' author, adopted the voice of a disappeared daughter to deface the mischievous walkabouts of a missing father. Conversely, in *Una muchacha muy bella* (2013), a first-person novella, Julián Lopéz makes up the mysterious nuances of a love-story between a child and his later-to-be-disappeared-mother.

Throughout this cultural field, women's literary production has been particularly strong, a point noted by Maria Moreno in *Oración* (2018). There she crafts the term "HIJAS sin *puntito*" [daughters without full stops] as a feminist

acronymic of “H.I.J.O.S.”, the organisation created by the Children of the Disappeared in the 1990s. In doing so, she identifies the growing pleasure underlying a wave of female artists, not necessarily related by blood to the missing, but still trying to account for their traces through appealing twists and diversions. Indeed, in *Mi vida después* (2009), the theatre director Lola Arias, who has no disappeared relatives in her family, invited six actors born during the dictatorship to put on the clothes that their parents used in the 1970’s to rewrite, and maybe also crossover, their own inheritance. In *Diario de una princesa montonera. 110% verdad* (2012), Mariana Eva Perez, daughter of disappeared parents, undressed the non-confessed pleasures nestling in the world of the “hijis”, as she referred to the Children of the Disappeared. In those terms, this blue-blood princess unveiled the privilege of bearing the lineage of the victims. At the end of the cycle, the writer and journalist Marta Dillon, also a founding member of *Ni una menos* collective, portrayed the anxieties of encountering the remains of her mother thirty-five years after her abduction in 1977. *Aparecida* (2015), a novel-public letter-poetic essay, struck an epochal tone in which it was possible to organize “a postponed funeral as if it were a party” (Dillon: 153). Perhaps foreshadowing the post-2015 period, *Aparecida* outlined the affective tone of a network of women inhabited by a “crazy fairy” humour, which would show a novel turn in the entanglement between feminism and mourning.

Within this series, the use of black humour, a recurring trope within the imaginaries of children of the disappeared, was intertwined with a radical queer/feminist vector that enhanced mourning and pleasure. *Aparecida* made that encounter poignantly visible. When Dillon finally recovers the remains of her mother, just as she was about to marry Albertina Carri, her partner until 2015.⁷ Those conflicting energies found the brides adopting unconventional wedding outfits: they both dressed in black, “like dominatrices of black rubber bras”, she described. “Esas éramos más nosotras, más lascivas, más dispuestas a usar el luto para bailar clavando los tacos sobre el dolor, obligándolo a aullar de alegría” [That was more like us, more lascivious, aiming to use mourning to dance and nail highheels into the pain, forcing it to howl with joy] (Dillon, 2015: 96). To force pain to howl with joy: this extreme image anticipated the feminist/queer turn in the post-2015 period, when loss was transformed into a lascivious dance.

The conservative restoration and *Ni una menos*’ sororidad

The political shift inaugurated in December 2015 ambushed the expanded filiation modes that had grown under the previous administration. Driven by an ideology of privatisation and the shrinking of the state, the regressive government led by businessman Mauricio Macri sought to circumscribe and discipline all glimpses of a politics based around the common. Nevertheless, the process of transferring the experience of grief continued to function as a sounding box leading to unforeseen affective configurations and displacements. In particular, the recent feminist tide, macerated in successive national and regional meetings, and enhanced by the expansion of the *Ni una menos* collective, managed to recreate an anti-patriarchal momentum on the local scene. At an international level, since 2014, the feminist movement gained new force, especially on social media. As investigated by Mendes, “feminists have increasingly turned to digital technologies and social media platforms to dialogue, network and organize against contemporary sexism, misogyny and rape culture” (Mendes et al, 2018: 236). In October 2017, the #MeToo hashtag was a trending tool for showcasing sexual violence worldwide. The hashtag went viral on Twitter in response to the allegations of sexual assault by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein.⁸ Thousands of women across the world shared and replicated #MeToo to tell their own personal experiences of abuse.

Yet how did the feminist irruption, which has been called a “molecular revolution”, come about in post-2015 Argentina? The local feminist movement was not new. Every year since 1986 the feminist movement has gathered in the *Encuentros Nacionales de Mujeres* [Women National Meetings] (ENM). For two decades, the ENMs facilitated the formation of groups of more than 350 organizations. The meetings followed a federal model and expanded throughout the country with a horizontal scheme. The ENM grew not only in coverage and numbers but also in perspectives; lesbo-feminist sectors have gained particular force in recent years. And since 2003, the *Campaña Nacional Por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito* [National Campaign for the right to legal, safe and free abortion] has been demanding the legalisation of abortion in public hospitals, one of the major causes of women’s death in the country.⁹

The feminist movement would, however, experience a major sea change in the post-December 2015 period. Although the local feminist movement had been, by definition, highly heterogeneous, only after the conservative backlash it reached unprecedented momentum. On the one hand, the ENM became increasingly popular.

On the other, *Ni una menos*' interventions became a new form of pedagogy for youngsters in the streets. If the collective defined itself from the beginning as “a collective cry against *machista* violence”, eventually this cry, rather than a painful lament, revealed a horizontal, radical and dissident vector. Thus, *Ni una menos* helped to create a novel atmosphere that would disseminate across the country, Latin America and beyond.¹⁰

[Photo 2 about here]

Ni una menos' first massive action took place on June 3, 2015 at the Plaza de los Dos Congresos. Despite being sparked off by the femicide of Daiana García, a 19-year-old woman murdered by her partner, one of the first governing ideas of the event was to reject victimizing strategies. With the support of unions, political and social organizations, the march gathered more than 300,000 women and concluded with the presentation of demands that gave evidence of long-standing and widespread patriarchal structures. The following year, with the new right-wing government already in place, the anniversary march of June 3, 2016 had an even more massive and surprisingly unified character. The Plaza de Mayo overflowed with women who brought an expanded agenda, including strong LGBT claims. By then, the slogan had become “*Vivas nos queremos*” [We want to be alive], and the aspiration started to be as provocative as international: “*Nos mueve el deseo*” [Desire moves us]. Highly heterogeneous personal and social memories inundated the public space agitating a first-time will to meet in the streets and exhibited a growing pleasure for the scenic. Younger generations were able to embrace a seasoned feminism without guilt. It was the emergence of a new collective force, a local *sororidad*. This female fraternity suggested a scandalous sisterhood as political kinship, which *Las hijas del fuego* would take into the screen.

The First Women's Strike made this force explicit enough. A week after the Women's Encuentro in Rosario in 2016, the brutal rape and murder of a 16-year-old girl in Mar del Plata precipitated an unprecedented mobilization. Under the hashtags #paronacionaldemujeres and #vivasnosqueremos, the *Ni una menos* organisation launched a virtual campaign to call for the “the first strike of women in the history of Latin America”. The campaign went viral in one week. Social networks showed their exceptional power to foment cross-generational anger. On October 19, about 150,000 female demonstrators marched from the Obelisco to the Plaza de Mayo. Dressed in black, women of all ages, though mostly youngsters, paraded together through

torrential rain. They made grief and vulnerability the conditions of a new empowerment. Demonstrators perceived themselves not as victims but as social actors eager to be heard. “We marched screaming, not crying”, said local feminist Eva Giberti (Peker, 2016).

The desire to avoid victimising strategies became an affective surplus, which runs throughout the feminist tide. If at first sight, the demonstrations instigated by *Ni una menos* appeared to have a defensive character, “We march because they kill us”, the movement eventually managed to privilege the joy of encounter. In so doing, it irradiated a collective desire, which exceeded individual members. The spirit belonged to the multitude, likely to spread like a “virus” – as it was recently defined. The reluctance to assume any sense of ownership was accompanied by a widespread sense of belonging and spirit of companionship, which also shaped the affective tone that was circulating in the streets.

[Photo 3 about here]

The debates around legal abortion that took place during the winter of 2018 moved public opinion into a novel direction. On June 18, 2018, the lower parliamentary house passed the project. During an epic night, thousands of teenagers waited the vote in the streets and celebrated the results with shouts of joy and hugs. However, on August 8 that year, after more than 15 hours of debate, Senators rejected the bill by 38 votes against 31. By then the green neckerchief had become a new collective symbol. The presence of young women and teenagers at every demonstration was so huge that the movement came to be described as the “revolution of the daughters” (Peker, April 27, 2018). Within an extraordinary combination of fierce and joy, *Las hijas del fuego* would push the “revolution of the daughters” into another dimension.

A military femicide

To acknowledge the particular way in which the new feminist movement became entangled with the long tradition of memory struggles, I would like to return to an earlier, seminal reading of both fields. In *Acts of Disappearance* (1997), the renowned feminist and specialist in performance studies Diana Taylor defined the Argentine dictatorial experiment as a form of “percepticide”, a period governed by terror in which the population was forced not to see in order to survive. For Taylor, the percepticide also worked as a mode of femicide, a moment of repression and

invisibility in which the very idea of the Patria became feminized. This deeply gendered character of military terror was something that, according to Taylor, had not been seen previously, and surreptitiously deepened a misogynist version of the Nation. In her reading of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo's activism around their missing children, Taylor contended that although the group had managed to destabilize the military power by stressing motherhood as a social construction, it also left a patriarchal root untouched. By calling attention to motherhood as a social, not just a biological construct, the Mothers destabilized the military. However, she argued, they also 'left a restrictive patriarchal system basically unchallenged'" (Taylor, 1997: 119). By assuming the role of "defenseless mothers looking for their children", the group of women was caught in a "bad script" (Taylor, 1997: 203).

I have debated Taylor's argument in previous works (see Sosa, 2011, 2014). Overall, I have contended that a univocal association between military terror / femicide tended to restrict the non-normative projections of the local dictatorial experience, which to my mind, far exceeded a gender issue. In this vein, and against Taylor's version, I have argued that the motto of the Mothers, "Nuestros hijos nos dieron la vida" [Our children gave life to us] could be read as a radical questioning of simply a reproductive motherhood. By exaggerating their biological function, the Mothers managed to discompose the maternal pose. More than operating within the frame of biological motherhood, the 'excess' of their obsession disturbed patriarchal conceptions of motherhood, conspiring against the logic of the biological script and ultimately any regime supported on blood (Sosa, 2011: 67). Thus, by reversing the biological cycles, the Mothers managed to inaugurate an alternative lineage in mourning that I defined as queer (Sosa, 2011:67).

Yet in the light of the regressive culture displayed in the post-2015 cycle, I believe that Taylor's argument is worth considering from an alternative perspective. Her denunciation of the survival of a sexist and misogynist structure has acquired unexpected nuances. The rising feminist tide's ability to call into question the seeds of military terror infused its waves with a surprising dynamism. In fact, it was precisely this deep, viscerally patriarchal tone, still embedded in the matrix of the social, that became visible and was questioned by recent feminist irruptions. Apart from resilient mothers, the streets were surprisingly full of daughters, sisters, cousins, an expanded and expansive green tide of women of all ages. The demand for missing children had turned into a demand for the right to decide when, and if, they wanted to have

children in the first place. *Poder, poder, poder. Ahora que estamos juntas, ahora que sí nos ven, el patriarcado se va a caer* [Power, power, power. Now that we are together, now that they see us, patriarchy will fall].¹¹ As one of the most iterated chants revealed, the refurbished version of conservatism shed light on something that was not possible to see before. The revolution of the daughters was around the corner.

A festive surplus

Why did the process of cross-fertilization between the legacies of military terror and a critical feminism emerge in such a regressive neoliberal period? The administration of Cambiemos, the name of the official party led by Macri's right wing coalition, imposed a form of economic austerity and a political discipline that tended to focus on social areas that, during the previous period, had managed to unite powerful community forces. The official attack was especially bloody in areas of public administration associated with so-called "human rights policies". Tensions became visible around a numerical issue. "The disappeared did not total 30,000", provoked Darío Lopérfido, the former Minister of Culture of Buenos Aires (January 26, 2016, *Perfil*). The widespread rejection of this statement brought about his resignation. Yet, only months later, President Macri joined the dispute: "I have no idea [if they were 30,000]. It is a debate, if they were 9,000 or 30,000, I don't want to get involved", he said (Rosemberg, August 11, 2016, *La Nación*). By questioning the figure claimed by human rights organizations for over three decades, the new administration made explicit its hesitation in repudiating a de facto military regime, which clandestinely assassinated citizens and still hides information about the whereabouts of its victims. The "Lopérfido affair" was never a debate about numbers but a profound attack on a community built on the reverberant affections of grief, which had expanded beyond blood barriers.

If by the end of the 1970s the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo used their bodies as an archive to make visible the absence of their children, in the 1990s the *piqueterxs* use the pure physical materiality of their bodies to oppose the neoliberal policies that left them unemployed and literally in the streets. Correspondingly, in the post-December 2015 period, the irruption of the women's movement in the public arena denounced another mode of abuse, perhaps more subtle and complex. During the conservative retreat, the massive presence of youngsters in the street signposted the persistent forms of femicide taking place in the country. By agglutinating disparate

social and personal narratives, the new feminist wave, fostered in the expansion of rights of the previous period, was able to denounce the persistence of a misogynist-patriarchal structure inherited from prior to the dictatorship and its aftermath. And it did so with unknown effervescence, vitality, and even joviality. By recovering some of the energy of the first *escraches* during the mid 1990s, the distinctive mix of vibrant, colourful and queer vibrations marked the feminist tide. It became the best weapon against conservatism. Slogans radicalized. Nothing seemed impossible. The group managed to elude punitive temptations. “I do not want to be a victim, I want to be free”. During the day of the first International Women’s Strike on October 19, 2016, and also during the anniversary march of 2017, a festive surplus seemed to radiate from the group. The conditions of precariousness and vulnerability wore an incipient recklessness and invisibility seemed to be reversed. A restored public space vibrated. It was the time of the daughters. The resistance wanted to be happy.

Las hijas del fuego

Albertina Carri’s latest film provides a major insight of these combined cycles of resistance. Released during the 2018 BAFICI festival and exhibited within independent, militant international circles, *Las hijas del fuego* is a scandalous film. Not only because it is a pornographic, lesbian film, but also because it manages to reinvent a polyamorous fiction of self-foundation apt for the present period of neoconservative backlash.¹² As I will argue, in its endeavour to reinvent feminist porn, the film manages to re-launch a new system of kinship based on a powerful (and also joyful) female network, which is already circulating on Argentina’s streets. Thus, *Las hijas del fuego* proposes a fiction of non-blood origins, and ultimately, new ways of being together.

Sixteen years after the release of *Los rubios*, Carri’s first documentary piece is still a cult object. In 2016, the artist returned to this seminal documentary piece as the inspiration for another documentary, *Cuatreros* (2016), a favourite at both the Berlin and Mar del Plata film festivals. Drawing upon the first book written by her father, the film follows the traces of Isidro Velázquez, the country’s last *cuatrero* [rustler], shot dead in 1967. Less explored, however, has been *Barbie también puede estar triste* (2001), a short-animated film that Carri launched at the beginning of her career and was awarded Best Foreign Film at the New York Mix Festival. There, she had already explored feminist porn by subverting the conventions of animation –

putatively a childish genre – to launch a critique of the heteronormative and patriarchal strategies, an impulse that her latest piece would take to a joyful extreme.

[Photo 4 about here]

In *Las hijas del fuego*, the action begins with a couple, reunited in the very south of the country after a month of being apart. To celebrate the reunion, the two girls make their way to a local bar and end up in a fight. Local men react violently to the affective gestures of the couple who embrace and kiss each other. A local girl steps in to defend the couple and the three of them run away joyfully. Eventually, the festive team steals a van to start a new, longer journey. Viewers witness the blissful formation of an expanded female network. Bodies, territory and landscape are secretly entangled in the film. If the question of how to make a documentary was at the core of *Los rubios* and, to some extent, also in *Cuatreros*, *Las hijas del fuego* searches for a new genre, and even a new beginning. If in previous documentary pieces, the director still reacted to the figure of her well-known intellectual father, in her latest fiction, there are no fathers. Rather, in *Las hijas del fuego*'s beginning there are mythical mothers who travel to the Antarctic, maybe the most pure space of fiction, to conduct scientific experiments. Now, some of their descendants are back on the mainland and travel freely towards the North.

As much as one of the girls is researching porn, “¿*Qué cuento cuando cuento porno?*” [What story do I tell when I tell porn?], this performative endeavour captures the whole film. A sense of contagion underlies the journey of the female team. It is a sexual colonisation, a poetic and political orgy. Sex is literally the connective vector, the affective “glue” that builds the network of women, which reproduces itself like an actual virus. As with porn films, plot is not particularly important in *Las hijas del fuego*. The journey develops with a kind of organic rhythm, an agitated progression of a series of sexual encounters, which become increasingly intense and narcotic. The film is subtly playful, elusive and sophisticated. There are many long sequences, fully poetic passages, that both celebrate the beauty of all types of bodies and women genitalia, and ironically suggest a higher and more complex stage of social development. Besides its tantalising excitement, the film suggests an alternative form of haptic knowledge irradiating across the screen. *Las hijas del fuego* is governed by the pleasures of the bodies (and their attunement) of being together. In that sense, the film is rebellious: it draws upon and calls for new forms of affective agency and insubordination. By portraying this sense of orgiastic contagion, *Las hijas del fuego*

beautifully intertwines with Argentina's political context: it brings onto the screen the revolution of the daughters already taking place on the streets. Moreover, Carri's pornographic fiction seems to work through the local tradition of a radical female lineage, one that goes from the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo to their youngest feminist descendants.

Guerrilla girls

Carri's film is reminiscent of *Les Guérillères* (1969), the seminal feminist novel written by the French writer Monique Wittig in the wake of the May 1968 student-worker revolution in France. Almost five decades later, *Las hijas del fuego* echoes Wittig's radical lesbian impulse by re-constructing the figure of southern porn *guérillères*, a team of female guerrilla fighters that contests misogynist traditions still present in a marginal Latin American country. If in *Les guérillères*, it is possible to observe the tribal activities of a large number of women "who live in a beautiful and colourful setting, never completely described, that is sometimes a Greek island, sometimes, perhaps, a seaside resort, sometimes a futuristic city" (Durand, 1974: 71), here too Carri creates a contemporary road movie, which takes the Patagonian countryside as its affective landscape. In similar fashion to *Les Guérillères*, in Carri's film the female team might be thought of as a mythical tribe that aims at disseminating an alternative form of justice on its way. Although there are multiple characters, it is mainly the tribe, the female network that embodies the collective protagonist, and eventually becomes its own deity.

In one exceptional sequence of the film, the rage of the tribe is directed at an abusive husband. He becomes the centre of the group's anger and finally the source of mockery and ridicule, before he is expelled from the main land. In some sense, the scene seems to be embedded in *Les Guerrilles'* impulse. Arguably, the members of the group could easily be accused of *feminazis*, a term that has been used locally to attack and mock feminists who reject misogynist behaviours.¹³ Carri's film playfully dialogues with this tradition. In fact, the female network manages to turn hate into collective energy. If the local *guérillères* also torture their tormentors, rather than a literal promise of physical vengeance, as Durand argues in relation to Wittig's literary piece, it is "the language of feminism speaking out its rages and frustration" (1974: 76). In Carri's film the use of violence seems a strategy to shock viewers into a new sense of awareness. It reveals the centre of the *guérillères'* anger, a sense of

emotional and physical violence, for which “feminism provides a sane and constructive outlet” (Durand: 76). In fact, the sequence could be thought of as the end of gender abuse as a contemporary form of slavery while staging the conquest of a brand new female land. To some extent, the scene humorously stages the mythical expulsion of the last *Machirulo* from the Southern lands.¹⁴

The exultant crew of women is growing bigger. One of the recruitments is particularly revealing. One of the members of the group crosses paths with a middle-aged woman who cycles along a deserted countryside path. The skin of the stranger is dark, her lips generous. The women exchange a couple of words. Ostensibly, the foreigner bears the accent associated with the population in the north of the country, usually stigmatised. Rather than dismissing her background, Carri’s *guérrillère* addresses the stranger with a surprising request: “Decime algo con ‘erre” [Tell me something with “r”]. The demand is somehow satisfied and the women embrace and kiss each other passionately. The group has a newcomer. This sequence is as unexpected as it is hilarious. More than that, though, the neglected accent, usually a means for stigmatization, becomes an erotising path. As Judith Butler reminds us, just as words have the power to wound us, that performative power can also be overturned (Butler, 1997: 40). In other words, in the scene the naming of trauma, in this case a particular way of pronouncing the “r”, opens up new forms of agency and insubordination. This particular line in the script – “tell me something with ‘r” – signposts the moment when an injurious speech is reversed to embody the means for novel desires. There is an alternative form of agency emerging from that operation; one that involves speaking out in a way that has been largely dismissed. By reworking hate speech, *Las hijas del fuego* opens up playful worlds of recognition that, in Butler’s words, might create new forms of future legitimation (1997: 40). As the infuriated green tide shouted after Senators rejected to secure the abortion rights, “It is only a matter of time”.

Although it is possible to read *Las hijas del fuego* as a sort of radical feminist fable taking place in a suspended time, it does coalesce with the current Argentine political landscape. In that sense, the line analysed above is expressive of a particular feminist activation. The incorporation of the new incomer, somehow a fresher in the unexpected world of radical lesbian feminism, bears witness to the sense of transversal colonisation that the local movement has gained. As Cecilia Palmeiro comments, “This transversality means that we connect our struggles with those of

other women, that we mirror ourselves and multiply [...] as a global micro-capillary network and fabric” (Palmeiro, 2018: 4). Echoing that expansive will, in Carri’s fiction the female network aims at embracing trans, marginal and often neglected members of the population. And this happens literally in the film, mirroring a sense of contagion, a sort of fluidity of bodies in tune with each other beyond all differences of class, race, weight or sexual preferences.

[Photo 5 about here]

Also, territorially speaking, *Las hijas del fuego* sheds light on the eagerness of a federal colonisation, which goes beyond national borders. In fact, *Ni una menos’* International Strikes have become increasingly transnational. If the main problem of feminist movements has historically been the difficulty of overcoming isolated expressions of intense but fleeting impulses, in Argentina’s case there has been an explicit attempt to transpose normative boundaries and engage with the construction of a transnational, queer and feminist *Matria*.

Our body, our territory

Las hijas del fuego’s last scene is potentially puzzling. The journey has reached its final stage and a party is taking place. The big house is buzzing. It belongs to the mother of a member of the tribe. Some of them are dancing, others engage in different sexual practices. The pool is open. The camera shows all sorts of female bodies hanging out, drinking, laughing, kissing, engaging in SM scenes. It is an epic, utopian landscape that also brings into flesh Witting’s hedonist atmosphere. In this joyful context, a young woman sits by herself in the garden. She wears big headphones. She is alone, immersed in a silent bubble. She listens to her music, which, as spectators, we cannot hear. At some point, she starts masturbating. The scene is long, unspeakably tense, uncomfortable. It only finishes when she climaxes. Far from effusive, it is a quiet, internal, even self-conscious moment, one that contrasts starkly to the bustling party taking place around her.

I suggest that this final sequence of the film might be read alongside one of the main taglines of the feminist movement in the post-December 2015 period: “Our body, our territory”. Feminist ruminations have long refused to identify the body with the sphere of the private, speaking instead of a “body politics” (Federici, 2004: 16). This empowering call has also spread inside the local movement, transforming women’s desire into a territorial weapon on various levels. In the wake of the 2018

International Women's Strike, *Ni una Menos* promoted a parallel activity against patriarchy, baptised as "Orgasmathon". At 12 midnight of the strike, the collective launched a "global and massive orgasm", which called for a new politics of desire for LGTB and feminist communities. The manifesto that circulated on social media prior to the event read: "All of us and each of us, alone or together, wherever we are and with whatever we have in hand, in the way we like best, in the way that we can, and if we cannot we still have fun trying: everything counts, all pleasures and all bodies count for this sexual revolution. *We turn the orgasm into an arm of rebellion, a source of energy to resensualise the struggle*" (*Ni una menos*).¹⁵ The scene that concludes Carri's film seems to embody that *Orgasmathon* spirit. It approaches individual orgasms as an arm of rebellion, a collective tool that aims at re-sensualising the general feminist struggle.

Albertina Carri's film is a provocation. The incitement should be taken seriously, but probably not too literally. Ultimately, the film could be read as a poem of empowerment. It manages to stage those conflicting emotions that emerged in the post-2015 era. *Las hijas del fuego* is only thinkable alongside the impact of the *Ni una menos* collective and the feminist tide that took over the country in this period. In those terms, the film also counts as a marker of resistance. It pushes back against neoconservatism while postulating a fully emancipated feminist movement. The film is playful, festive and probably also ironic. If the local feminist movement has been defined as the main (and potentially the most feared) actor in the post-2015 era, *Las hijas del fuego* is fully immersed in this counter-power. In so doing, the film becomes an artefact ready to enchant new audiences, bringing together a passionate, orgiastic sisterhood as its main banner. Ultimately, *Las hijas del fuego* stages the revolution of the daughters, not just those directly affected by loss but also, as Maria Moreno would say, the daughters with or without *puntito*.

Epilogue: Towards a feminist *Matria*

The post-December 2015 scenario allows us to rethink the argument of invisibility put forward by Diana Taylor in 1997. The current conservative reaction activated a non-blood performance of disappearance that revealed a dissident, even queer, vein. 40 years after the military coup, two different experiences of mourning potentiate each other. Slogans such as *Nunca Más* [Never again] and *Ni una Menos* [Not one less] link and feed off each other. The coexistence of both slogans – and ultimately both

movements – delineates the affective cartography of the current moment. Together, they subvert normative traditions by showing how affiliations are fundamentally political. In this assembly of non-normative affections, the reverberations of the traumatic past are processed in a novel way. During the current conservative retraction, which mixes religious and new age components, social protest was brutally repressed. Yet the emerging tide of young feminists freed itself from biologistic and victimizing traditions. The appeal for enjoyment irradiated by the movement has given the resistance an unusual celebratory and even festive wake.

If in the face of the first International Women's Strike in 2016, Estela Carlotto, President of *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, distinguished the traumatic events that brought the Mothers and Grandmothers into being in the 1970s from the current feminist demonstrations, the following months accentuated the imbrications between those disparate ways of confronting disappearance and mourning. In 2018, Nora Cortiñas, one of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, was a main speaker at a *Ni Una Menos* strike-demonstration. She showed up wearing the green neckerchief associated with the campaign to legalise abortion.¹⁶

[Photo 6 about here: Nora Cortiñas]

Far from trivializing the struggle of traditional memory groups, the provocations and denials over the dictatorship's legacies set out by *Cambiamos'* administration succeeded in encouraging these affective entanglements. Conversely, the image of the Plaza de Mayo covered by white handkerchiefs during the 2x1 demonstration on 10 May 2017 showed how the “Never again” slogan had managed to retain its power to re-inscribe further complex processes within the collective imagination. It revealed how, beyond ages and genders, communities have an expansive capacity for renewal and contagion.

In the post-2015 cycle, the rejection of terror included, for the first time, the denunciation of a misogynistic and sexist component, which had previously been ignored. As the sociologist María Pía López, founding member of *Ni una Menos*, argued in the wake of Carla Vallejos' murdering, “El femicida sigue caminando por el barrio, impune” [The author of a femicide continues to walk throughout the neighbourhood, unpunished] (*Anfibia*, 2016, 20 October). The personification of a perpetrator of gender violence as a public figure freely circulating through the streets, revealed a curious amalgamation of traumatic memories. If in the mid-1990s, the Children of the Disappeared created *escraches* to bring shame upon unpunished

repressors, now the exercise of public shame have experienced a queer/feminist turn. Both figures, shared a common suspicion, which was already implicit in Taylor's hypothesis: every military repressor is already a perpetrator of gender abuse. Yet, during the current conservative backlash these traumatic memories seemed to inspire and complement each other. Disparate traumatic memories became intertwined in the public scene, contributing to the formation of other publics and collectives. The recent feminist tide showed an unexpected ability to synergise that collective energy. As Carri's polyamorous piece also suggests, the feminist movement has given space to unconventional forms of pleasure arising within different forms of vulnerability and loss.

The long tradition associated with memory struggles and the recent feminist awakening have nourished areas of transmission and contagion for extended audiences. It is precisely their adverse circumstances that underline their affective potential for a re-invention of the political, working as an inspiration for trans-national and trans-generational communities. As suggested by Carri's film, the knotting together of memory struggles and expanded feminisms not only challenges Taylor's argument in relation to a feminised idea of the Patria. Rather, it sheds light on an enhanced *Matria*. This re-loaded, non-normative figure is capable of watching over multidirectional memories, sheltering both recovered grandchildren and a new feminist *sororidad*. Upon this multi-coloured *Matria* guerrilla deities pursue a dance of empowerment, agitated by enfolding subversive desires that link past and present, pleasure and loss.

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List of Photographs

Photo 1: Umbrellas in The Plaza de Mayo. First Women's International Strike (October 19, 2016).

Credits: Cecilia Palmeiro

Photo 2: *Ni una Menos'* 2018 Anniversary Demonstration March in Santa Fe (June 3, 2018).

Credits: Agustina Girardo

Photo 3. Schoolgirls waiting for the abortion bill to be voted at the Lower Parliament (June 18, 2018).

Credits: Lina Etchesuri/ Cooperativa La Vaca

Photo 4: The reunion of the protagonist couple in Ushuaia, where an orgiastic road-trip toward the north would begin. Bodies, territory and landscape are secretly entangled in the film.

Credits: *Las hijas del fuego*. Directors of photography: Soledad Rodriguez and Inés Duacastella

Photo 5. Carri's film celebrates the power of female bodies, which calls for new forms of affiliations/insubordination.

Credits: *Las hijas del fuego*. Directors of photography: Soledad Rodriguez and Inés Duacastella

Photo 6: Nora Cortiñas at *Ni Una Menos'* strike-demonstration wearing both the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo's traditional white scarf and the green neckerchief associated to legal abortion campaign.

Credits: Image taken by the author at *Mareadas en la marea*. *Ni Una Menos'*s exhibition in London (June 2018).

¹ The research for this article was sponsored by the AHRC project: Staging Difficult Pasts. Of Objects, Narrative and Public Memory”(AH/R006849/1).

² See interview conducted with local feminist Dora Barrancos, Eva Giverti and Diana Maffia (Peker, 2016), <http://www.nodal.am/2016/10/entrevista-eva-giverti-dora-barrancos-y-diana-maffia-analizan-el-paro-de-mujeres-contra-la-violencia-machista->

³ October 17 reminds of the massive working class march in 1945 that demanded for Juan Domingo Perón’s liberation.

⁴ In Muiño’s case, the Supreme Court tried to introduce the “2 for 1” law, which allows for the days spent in incarceration to count double.

⁵ *Ni una menos*’ inaugural event denounced the 10-year disappearance of Florencia Pennacchi and the discovery of Daiana García’s body inside a rubbish bag.

⁶ Carri also returned to this seminal piece. On September 4 2015, she launched a site-specific installation at the Memory Park entitled *Operación fracaso y el sonido recobrado Investigación del cuatreroismo*. The piece, made up of five screens with sound, suggested a self-portrait of memory, including letters, scripts and film fragments.

⁷ Carri and Dillon were together until 2015. After the split, Dillon strengthened her feminist activism in *Ni una menos* while Carri continued her filmmaking career, moving away from explicit memory issues to a self-created feminist political porn.

⁸ African American women’s rights activist Tarana Burke was the first to use the MeToo phrase back in 2006 (See Mendes et al, 2018).

⁹ In Argentina half a million clandestine abortions are conducted every year, producing 43 deaths annually. See <https://www.publico.es/internacional/lucha-legalizacion-aborto-continua-argentina-volvera-presentarse-ley-2019.html> (accessed 19 February, 2019).

¹⁰ Both Italian and Polish recent feminist movements were inspired by *Ni una menos* (Salvatori, 2018).

¹¹ The highlighted is mine.

¹² In fact, since 2015 Carri is also the artistic director of *Asterisco*, the first International LGBTIQ Film Festival in Argentina.

¹³ For further insights on the expression “feminazi” see Maria Estella Belloni, 2018.

¹⁴ *Machirulo* is a term coined by local feminism to define those apparently proud of being *machista* [misogynist]. The expression was popularized in May 2018 when former President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner used it to respond to President Macri. She said: “Address a woman as mad, typical of a machirulo”. See <https://www.iprofesional.com/notas/269010-twitter-cristina-kirchner-mauricio-macri-argentina-jefe-presidente-machirulo-Que-significa-machirulo-el-termino-que-utilizo-Cristina-para-responderle-a-Macri> (accessed 10 February, 2019).

¹⁵ The italics are mine.

¹⁶ The image of Nora Cortiñas wearing the green neckerchief was included in *Mareadas en la Marea*, *Ni una menos*’s exhibition in London, June 2018.