

***Queering Acts of Mourning in the Aftermath of Argentina's Dictatorship: The Performances of Blood.* By Cecilia Sosa. Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2014. Pp ix + 190.**

The topic of post-authoritarian memory and mourning in Argentina has accreted a robust literature in recent years. *Queering Acts of Mourning in the Aftermath of Argentina's Dictatorship* adds an original perspective to this body of work, providing a revisionist and theoretically informed account of the politics of memory in Argentina. A performance studies scholar, Cecilia Sosa constructs a diverse archive, including literary, theatrical, and cookery 'performances', from which she arrives at a bold and provocative thesis: recent artistic and organizational attempts to work through the trauma inflicted by the authoritarian state are creating 'an expanded collection of pleasure' (p. 2) among a community of mourners that extends beyond bloodline relatives of the disappeared alone.

Sosa, following Judith Butler, defines 'queering' as 'an argument against certain normativity' (p. 2). The prescriptiveness that the book challenges, Sosa writes, is a human rights 'tradition' in Argentina that 'still champions a conservative idea of the family' (p. 2) and that consequently advocates a hierarchy of mourning in which biological attachment to victims of the dictatorship dominate. Sosa argues that blood relatives of the disappeared, via genealogy-based organizations such as the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, came to form a constructed 'wounded family' (p. 1) that functioned as a 'guardian of mourning' (p. 1) in the aftermath of authoritarian rule. Consecutive Kirchnerist administrations, she writes, adopted the 'family' as their own. The endorsement ensured the hegemony of this exclusionary community, even as it 'implicitly' contested its 'monopoly of blood' (p. 18). Against this officialized version of mourning, Sosa explains that other Argentine citizens - she included - felt debarred from public engagement with the traumatic recent past. *Queering Acts of Mourning* is, then, as much intervention as analysis: Sosa engages with a 'non-normative archive of mourning' (p. 8) that mitigates against the dominant narrative of the 'wounded family' and the necessary delimitations of its archive by including works by, about, and for 'the founding memories' of 'those who were originally excluded' (p. 8) from the community of bloodline mourners.

Chapter 1 examines how 'the problem of loss in Argentina has been framed as a family issue' (p. 9). Sosa traces an arc from the construction of the 'wounded family' in the late 1970s to current signs that its grip is loosening, through interrelated analyses of the rise to prominence of the Madres, Kirchnerist memory discourse and recent biographical accounts that challenge norms of mourning. Chapter 2 studies the use of dark humour as coping mechanism within H.I.J.O.S, an activist organization established in 1995. Sosa argues that its subversive humour challenged the rhetoric of established human rights groups to produce a 'non-normative culture of mourning' (p. 28) that offers its members - now children of the disappeared alongside other citizens - mechanisms for survival and collective pleasure in the wake of trauma. In Chapter 3, Sosa examines two documentary films, *Los Rubios* (2003), directed by Albertina Carri, and *M* (2007), by Nicolás Prividera, and a fictional film, *La Mujer sin cabeza* (2008) by Lucrecia Martel. Each, she proposes, challenges the primacy of genealogical ties in mourning processes.

Chapter 4 examines an unusual 'performance': cooking sessions hosted by Hebe de Bonafini, of the Madres, at the Escuela Superior de Mecánica de la Armada, a former clandestine detention centre in Buenos Aires. Using a figurative language elaborated from the combination of food and memory, Sosa argues that Bonafini's open table 'made loss palatable'. Her 'dinner guests', a group of mourners that included tourists and ordinary Argentines, together explored ways in which 'loss could be digested' (p. 104). Chapter 5 analyses the production and performance of *Mi vida después* (2009), a testimony-based theatre piece by Lola Arias, and opens up a broader discussion of the relationship between

spectatorship and mourning. Sosa finds that watching the piece facilitated a dual process of mourning and collective pleasure among audiences that included, and extended beyond, direct victims and their blood relatives. The close reading offered here is inspiringly multidimensional, focusing as subtly and attentively on audience experience as on the script. Chapter 6 and the Conclusion examine the intersections between memory debates and landmark political events, including the legalisation of same sex marriage in 2010. Such broader contextualisation, sometimes wanting earlier in the book, is a welcome component.

Sosa aims for the book to provide ‘new vocabularies’ to explain ‘the affective lines of transmission that already permeate the wider society’ (p. 2). Yet, she also suggests that the ‘language of the family’ cannot be ‘excised from critical analysis’ (p. 4). The performances that Sosa explores, and her framing language, reflect this second claim more persuasively than the first. They overwhelmingly reproduce the rhetoric of familial ties as the legitimate relationship for mourning, even as they ‘queer’ the concept of the family, shifting its meaning from biological kinship to a more widely applicable metaphor that includes affective non-biological attachments. Sosa thus celebrates the ESMA cooking sessions as the production of a ‘new family’ (p. 100), notes that participants at one session called Bonafini ‘Madre’ and suggests that the overseas circulation of *Mi vida después* created ‘transnational “siblings”’ (p. 171). A new language of community with which to articulate these emergent bonds remains absent. In Argentina, the family has long functioned as an emotive metaphor for the nation, as Sosa notes. Governments and oppositions have employed the language of the family to promote their versions of loyalty to the nation and to attempt to regulate citizen-state relations within it. Sosa clearly wrests the discourse of the family from these attempted hegemonic uses but her work also signals its enduring power, in Argentina, to articulate desired forms of community. In this respect, the book does not so much “fracture” conventional discourses on memory in Argentina’ (p. 2) as suggest their partial inescapability.

Queering Acts of Mourning undoubtedly expands our range of mechanisms for thinking about the recent past and our present interactions with it. This inventive and stimulating contribution will enrich the work of scholars interested in political transitions and their aftermath across disciplines and regions.

Tanya Filer, University of Cambridge