

MOTHER OF THE FREAKS

MOTHERING, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY IN CAMILA SOSA VILLADA'S *LAS MALAS*

A MÃE DE TODOS OS MONSTROS

MATERNIDADE, FAMÍLIA E COMUNIDADE EM *LAS MALAS* DE CAMILA SOSA VILLADA

ANA BESSA CARVALHO*
anacarvalho@elach.uminho.pt

While analysing *Las malas* (2019) by Camila Sosa Villada, this article looks at the family and its intersection within travesti identities and bodies. By portraying a group of travesti sex workers, Sosa Villada proposes alternative ways of constituting a family by questioning the patriarchal heteronormative structure, a structure marked by sexism, violence, homo and transphobia, and how the travesti community transforms the notion of family by making sisters and mothers out of friends and by adopting an abandoned baby. This adoption, an alternative proposal to heterosexual conception, proves to be the biggest obstacle for this community, apart from violence, prejudice, illness and premature death, given that, for the society that surrounds them, the idea of a travesti adopting a child is inconceivable. *Las malas* offers groundbreaking ways of creating bonds of affection and kinship beyond the structures defined by blood and the law, while also questioning notions of inheritance and genealogy, suggesting that it is through bonds that exist outside the family that feelings of belonging, sharing, and material and emotional security are experienced, especially when the blood family presents itself as a source of trauma and rejection.

Keywords: travesti; Family; adoption; heteronormativity.

Partindo do romance *Las malas* (2019) de Camila Sosa Villada, este artigo aborda a família e a sua intersecção com identidades e corpos travesti. Ao retratar um grupo de trabalhadoras sexuais travesti, Sosa Villada propõe formas alternativas de constituir família, ao questionar a estrutura heteronormativa patriarcal, uma estrutura marcada pelo machismo, violência, homo e transfobia, e a forma como a comunidade de travestis transforma a noção de família, ao fazer mães e irmãs de amigas, e através da adoção de um bebé abandonado. Esta adoção, uma proposta alternativa à concepção heterossexual, prova ser o maior obstáculo para esta comunidade, para além da violência, o preconceito, a doença e a morte prematura, uma vez que, para a sociedade que as rodeia, a ideia de uma travesti adotar uma criança é inconcebível. *Las malas* oferece formas inovadoras de criar laços de afeto e parentesco para além das estruturas definidas pelo sangue e pela lei, ao mesmo tempo que questiona noções de herança e genealogia, sugerindo que é através dos laços existentes fora do seio familiar que se experienciam sentimentos de pertença, partilha, segurança material e emocional, principalmente quando a família de sangue se apresenta como fonte de trauma e rejeição.

* Professora Convidada Equiparada a Professora Auxiliar, Universidade do Minho, Escola de Letras, Artes e Ciências Humanas, Departamento de Estudos Ingleses e Norte Americanos, Braga, Portugal.
ORCID: 0000-0001-7022-7276

Palavras-chave: travesti; família; adoção; heteronormatividade.

Data de recepção: 22-01-2024

Data de aceitação: 11-06-2024

DOI: 10.21814/2i.5601

1. Introduction

Las malas (2019),¹ written by Camila Sosa Villada, is a razor-sharp account of the lives – and many deaths – of the travesti sex workers that have made of the Sarmiento Park in Córdoba, Argentina, their workplace and home. Their lives revolve around fleeting, and possibly dangerous meetings with their clients, as they try to survive travesticide and HIV/AIDS, while taking care of each other, composing a “lifeline of blood and semen, infectious fluids carrying both danger and pleasure, creating (...) deadly bloodlines and families along the way” (Rose, 2019, p. 242).

The language of *Las malas* is raw but tender, and even though it has been referred to as autofiction (Mochkofsky, 2022) and even autobiography (Venturini, 2022), since its narrator is called Camila and her experiences as a travesti sex worker resemble the ones of Sosa Villada, the use of fantastical elements, such as animalistic creatures and women who seem immortal, makes of *Las malas* something else, although what is narrated, through metaphorical lyricism and brutal realism has indeed happened to many travestis, and even to Sosa Villada herself. Through body-writing and intimate self-reflexivity, Sosa Villada offers a collective view of a group of people with their own idiosyncrasies and personal needs, having already produced a short but solid and innovative body of literary work whose language, imagery, and themes make of it an original and necessary contribution to contemporary literary representations of travesti lives, one that is done through careful aesthetic choices and complex narrative methods. *Las malas* takes “the shape of both an aesthetic and political proposal, in a literary gesture that tries, while inscribing itself into the regional literary history, to form new poetics that allow the narration of experiences that go beyond the cis-hetero patriarchal matrix” (Gamba, 2022, p. 238).²

This is also clear in other works by Sosa Villada: in *Tesis sobre la domesticación* (2019), Sosa Villada returns to the matters of family making by narrating the story of a travesti actress who adopts an HIV-positive child with a gay lawyer, offering an alternative model to nuclear, heteronormative family making that is at the heart of this article and its case study. Her latest book, a collection of short stories entitled *Soy una tonta por quererte* (2022) is composed of intimate vignettes of the lives of travestis trying to make a living through sex work, closeted gay men trying to convince their families that they are straight, abandoned children suffering from parental violence, and other marginal voices and themes to whom Sosa Villada gives center stage, in a crossing between self and collective, something sustained by the critics of Sosa Villada’s work, such as Moya (2023) and Moszczyńska-Dürst (2021). Moreover, Henri Billard also suggests that *Las malas* is part of a larger body of literary work that been produced over the last few years in some countries of the Southern Cone in which “the notion of family can thus be seen to be extended to people who have no blood or genetic ties to the travesti trans protagonists” (2022, p.220), placing Sosa Villada at the center of a collective discourse about the vulnerability and abandonment of travesti bodies and the need to find alternative matrices of kinship and care, as well as in the series of Argentine avant-garde narratives that make use of a trans/travesti displacement of the canon (Gallego Cuiñas, 2022).

¹ Throughout this text, I quote from the English-language translation, published in 2022.

² My translation.

In *Las malas*, a young travesti named Camila is a university student by day and works at the park at night, where she is taken under the wing of “[t]he many-colored bird who protected us from death” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 60), Auntie Encarna, a 178-year-old travesti. Encarna takes care of the younger travestis as a mother would, but in a hierarchy-free, solidarity-based makeshift matriarchal family organised in one of the many structures of care of what Bradway and Freeman have defined to be “beyond heteronormative organizations of intimacy, care, desire, and even reproduction” (2022, p. 2). When Encarna comes across an abandoned baby in the park and decides to take him home, baptizing him as Twinkle in Her Eye, the lives of the travestis change dramatically: first for the better, then, for the incredibly worse. Twinkle and Encarna’s chosen daughters all live together in Encarna’s house, “[t]he queerest boardinghouse in the world” which “during desperate times it had offered shelter, protection, succor, and comfort to an endless stream of travestis (...) the safest possible place for them to be” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 5), embodying what seems to be a travesti utopia.

Through these multiple relationships, *Las malas* proposes multiple alternatives to heteronormative family-making, while highlighting its overbearing forces sustained by blood-based kinship and gender roles that enforce a binary sex system based on reproduction, in opposition to how “travesti politics, grounded in material reparations and intersectional coalition, mobilize friendship as one such potent and sustained political response” (Rizki, 2019, p. 145). Moreover, *Las malas* suggests a detachment of motherhood from the female body, by presenting childbearing as a symbolic gesture, and childrearing as a practice of care, disconnecting motherhood from mothering, and mothering from womanhood. This article entails an analysis of these relationships and how they challenge matters of inheritance, genealogy, and lineage, while also addressing the complexity and specificity of the travesti experience, in relation to the nation state and the institution of family.

At a particular moment of the narrative, the travestis watch the news of the death of Cris Miró, “the first travesti showgirl in Argentina, the first to be recognized by the media” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 25) on June 1, 1999. The travestis feel Miró’s death as if she were a relative. Miró, “our model and guiding light, the most famous and best of us all” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 44), serves as a referent for the possible existence and visibility of other travestis – “I was just a child when I first saw her on TV but I immediately knew that I wanted to be like her” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 24), says Camila. Miró stands as an ancestor for the travestis of the park, a type of matriarch that, although not related by blood, is related to the travestis as the mirror image of themselves. Since 1999, much has changed regarding the rights of travestis in Argentina: “[t]here have been three main historical claims of the travesti and trans community in Argentina: the legal recognition of their preferred gender; the possibility to decide on their bodies; and the accountability for their murder” (Sosa, 2020, p. 267). Still, Sosa Villada’s book reminds us that the history of violence and prejudice against travestis, during and after the dictatorship, must still be accounted for, that these lives marked by “absence, contempt, lack of hugs and rights, expulsion from the heterosexual home, embracing the street, poverty, prostitution, and (...) young death” (Medeiros, 2021, p. 254) are only as strong as the bonds they create between each other, for “[t]he fewer ties between us, the easier it was”, and still is, “to make us disappear” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 186).

2. The T Word

In an author's note, Sosa Villada opens *Las malas* explaining the meaning of the word "travesti", a word inscribed in a particular historical and social context and heavy with political implications. "Travesti" has been wrongly equated with "transgender" due to the dominance of Western discourses in gender studies. The word is "decorously buried under terms that were completely alien to us [travestis]" such as "trans women, transsexuals, or transgender (...) gender dysphoria and sexual dissidence" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. ix). "Travesti" is "a word that stank of death, shit, semen, prostitution, the night, the cold, bribery, blood and jail, of misery and neglect (...) sharp as a knife, grime-encrusted and wounding" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. x). It reclaims injury and insult "to articulate their [travesti] disavowal of normative categorization" (Pierce: 2020, p. 306) while generating "an insurrectional force that expands beyond the limits of embodied recognition" (Pierce, 2020, p. 306). More than embodying a sexual identity, being travesti implies a dis-identification: being "[t]ravesti is the refusal to be trans, the refusal to be woman, the refusal to be intelligible" (Rose, 2019, p. 243). The travesti body is also classed and raced, and while transgender experience is marked by surgical interventions through medical assistance, the travesti body is DIY, as many travestis live in impoverished conditions and cannot afford the desired bodily changes. Being a travesti means that "the use of body technologies to transform one's body does not come from a doctor's office but from resourcefulness in the face of *precarización*" (Rose, 2019, p. 242). In *Las malas*, the travestis' bodies are re-created with non-medical materials, such as aircraft oil, potentially dangerous and even fatal, reconfiguring these bodies not exactly as feminine, but something else, as "the areas where she'd [Encarna] injected herself turned an unpleasant bruised color and the liquid had run all over the place, lending her body a lunar landscape feel" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 12), turning Encarna's body into something that is not even quite human. Not being able to have access to medical resources, either medication for HIV or gender-affirming and cosmetic surgery, "means you get creative, you use pens for eyeliner, get your hormones and silicones from your friends underground, or use *tinta* instead of *testosterona*" (Rose, 2019, p. 243) in a re-writing of the body.

Being a travesti, as seen in *Las malas*, "also means you're only safe at night (...) outside the scrutiny of the regular order, state agents, and the establishment" particularly because the travesti "is usually a sex worker, whether out of need for money, validation, survival, or (...) a mixture of the three" (Rose, 2019, p. 243). Like Encarna and her travesti sisters, Camila "has migrated away from the family she was birthed into in order to be reborn among those of her kind" (Rose, 2019, p. 243); she is "the child of the travestis that refuse to be killed even when their physical bodies are no longer here" (Rose, 2019, p. 241). Being travesti is an act of resistance to normative kinship and embodied practices, stretching both to the ancestral past and the uncertain future, mainly through Encarna, as she is "daring to transgress, to open up new possibilities (...) to fight for our future, to stress the responsibility we have to one another in our collective care" (Rose, 2019, p. 239). By taking care of others, Encarna aims "toward a future imagined by our *ancestras*, which can be felt and enacted by us" (Rose, 2019, p. 239). Due to her age, Encarna also stands as an *ancestra* in a lineage of mothers that stand outside the heteronormative concepts of inheritance and genealogy, as "one of the eternal, invulnerable as an ancient stone idol" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 2), although it may seem contradictory to speak about ancestry and genealogy when the life expectancy of travestis is less than 40 years old.

As *Las malas* shows, against death and the rejection from their family, the travesti community has found ways to make kinship beyond the heteronormative matrix, by reconfiguring themselves into horizontal structures of support. Encarna enacts

Halberstam's time of inheritance,³ reconceptualising it while ensuring the safety of her daughters, who did not receive any knowledge on how to be a travesti at their family home. Moreover, and linked by the shared experience of being travesti, they also become connected by rejecting "the fairy tale of romantic love" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 11) in the shape of heteronormative, monogamous coupling, as they parody the family itself (Osores, 2021). Encarna also urges them to liberate themselves "from capitalism, family, and social security" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 11), to reject the institution of family and "state-sponsored normativity and its drive toward taxonomic classification" (Pierce: 2020, p. 308) by "refusing to adhere to normative parameters of multicultural inclusion and neoliberal sexual citizenship" (Pierce, 2020, p. 308).

3. A Family Album

Through Encarna's body, with "two nasty scars on her left knee from bullet wounds" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 12) fired against her during the dictatorship, Sosa Villada links travesti history to the nation's. This link between Argentinian fascism, family making, and non-normative sexuality is made explicit in Cole Rizki's work and how the "Argentine *nacionalista* ideology was staunchly invested in rigid gender distinctions" (Rizki, 2020b, 85). Nationalist discourses and gender politics are deeply intertwined in natalist discourses that sustain dictatorships, as passive women become vessels to bear children that will ensure the future of the nation and virile men embody the symbol of a violent and robust nation-state. Within this scenario, LGBTQI+ people cannot exist, as they are perceived as a threat to the purity of the state and therefore unworthy of national citizenship, as an emphasis on the nuclear family and ethical sexual behaviour pave the path towards the erasure of subversive sexual practices and identities. According to Rizki, the HIV/AIDS years further enhanced this categorisation of non-normative sexuality as a threat to the nation-state, "rendering travestis, prostitutes, homosexuals, and drug addicts the proper targets of surveillance" (2020b, p. 89), posing heterosexuality as the norm against these sexual identities that are contagiously dangerous and "the reproductive locus of an epidemic" (Rizki, 2020b, p. 89). When Sosa Villada crowns Encarna "the mother of all freaks" after she endures and survives the dictatorship, she stretches into the tragic past to encompass all these individuals who were deemed monstrous and ill, a recurrent category for LGBTQI+ individuals, who stand outside any possible realm of normative categorisation, be it the family or the state. When placed outside these institutions that should ensure acceptance, financial stability, and physical safety, it is up to the family of friends that the travestis compose to ensure some form of belonging, as suggested by Galligo Wetzel, when analysing *Las malas* and its "abandoned lives by the system, whose support is produced due to the bonds of fury, friendship, and resistance that unite that flock of travestis" (2020, p. 54).⁴

The link between travesti activism and the activism of the mothers and family members of those who disappeared during the dictatorship is made clear by Rizki. By recurring to the "familiar grammar of loss and belonging" (Rizki, 2020a) through a link to Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, "LGTBIQ+ organizations connected their claims to the legitimated repertoire of the families and victims of the dictatorship to expand political violence to sexual state repression" (Simonetto and Butierrez, 2023, p. 2). Just as the

³ "The time of inheritance refers to an overview of generational time within which values, wealth, goods, and morals are passed through family ties from one generation to the next" (Halberstam, 2005, p. 5).

⁴ My translation.

Madres reclaim justice for their relatives through the evocation of “the politically powerful image of a ‘wounded family’” (Sosa, 2011, p. 63), the travesti community expands this project for historical reparation based on blood-based kinship to encompass their travesti sisters, whose “precariousness (...) created generational gaps and restricted the possibility of constructing a narrative of their own history” (Simonetto and Butierrez, 2023, p. 5), as it is seen in Sosa Villada’s portrayal of Encarna’s family.

When writing about *Esta se fue, a esta la mataron, esta murió* (2017-2018), an exhibition organised by the Archivo de La Memoria Trans, Rizki (2020a) describes how the exhibition’s vernissage worked as a family reunion for Argentina’s travesti community. The exhibition consisted of photographs taken and collected by the community itself, curated as a family album of photographs that

hold particular social, cultural, and historical import for the ways in which they suggestively stage trans social formations as familial, which, in the context of Argentina, represents a central mode *par excellence* of national belonging. (Rizki, 2020a, p. 208)

These photographs “display the art of existing, of not only surviving but also flourishing against all odds” (Rizki, 2020a, p. 209), something that Sosa Villada also encapsulates in *Las malas*, particularly in the body of Encarna and its atypical age. Moreover, by “framing trans community representation through everyday grammars of kinship” the exhibition “puts pressure on existing national visual narratives of death and family loss during dictatorship (1976–1983) that elide trans subjects” (Rizki, 2020, 198). The language of the photographs themselves, “vernacular photography, a photographic genre comprised of family photographs” (Rizki, 2020a, p. 201) also displays the experience of the community as a family and “inscribes trans women within familiar scenes of everyday life” (Rizki, 2020a, p. 201). Through the capture of moments of domestic bliss and casual exchanges between the travestis, with their “unassuming generic conventions – frontal pose, centered subject, affectionate gestures like arms around shoulders and broad smiles” that “are universally recognizable to viewers and serve a social function marking familiarity and often kinship” (Rizki, 2020a, p. 201). As such, a family album is created, one made by travestis and trans women for themselves that exists in contrast with “sensationalist newspaper clippings and police reports” which “turn trans women’s lives and suffering into near constant media spectacle” (Rizki, 2020a, p. 201). This public display of a personal family album, one that “cultivates alternate modes of trans belonging in defiance of normative kinship structures that exclude trans subjects” (Rizki, 2020a, p. 206), enacts a double communal act of remembrance: one that results from assembling the photographs into a single family album, and one that is performed when those who have managed to survive get together to look at the photographs of those who are gone. Moreover, the exhibition is another contribution to the public discourse on the travesti memory, one of which Sosa Villada’s work is also a part.

Due to a need for adherence to a chronological logic of progress, in which children appear as they age and become cisgender adult men and women, family albums “are often sites of violence for trans subjects who do not cohere within such structures” given that “[p]hysical transition (...) disturbs the visual order of family albums as well as their kinship structures”, resulting in the erasure of trans individuals from family albums, “their photographs destroyed or otherwise removed if they are exiled from their families of origin” (Rizki, 2020a, p. 206). The family album that *Esta se fue, a esta la mataron, esta murió* composes challenges the blood-based kinship structures that cut out trans and travesti subjects from their family albums; the result is a family album designed by a common sense of rejection that comes from being travesti. In reclaiming the injury made to these bodies, these alternative accounts appropriate the language of the family, which

“has turned into a trap that encapsulates and restricts the possibilities of understanding the transmission of trauma beyond bloodline inscriptions” (Sosa, 2011, p. 63), by applying it to non-blood-based communities, enacting “a broader sense of belonging built on the basis of a common vulnerability and loss” (Sosa, 2011, p. 68), a sense of belonging which is at the heart of *Las malas*.

4. Mothering Mothers

Just as the word ‘family’ seems reductive to describe Encarna and Twinkle’s relationship, ‘motherhood’ does not apply to what Encarna does, particularly when taking into account “motherhood as institution and ideology, and mothering as experience and identity” (O’Reilly, 2020, p. 19). Encarna is socially perceived as unfit and embodies Rich’s ‘outlaw mother’ (1976); she achieves this status by taking care of her offspring in acts of mothering that are rather different from the ones enacted by mothers in patriarchal heteronormative structures based on reproductive timelines. According to O’Reilly, motherhood is “not a natural or biological function” but “specifically and fundamentally a cultural practice that is continuously redesigned in response to changing economic and societal factors” (2020, p. 20) and Encarna performs her own type of motherhood, showing “the experience or practice of mothering as distinct from the identity of the mother” and how “mothering may be performed by anyone who commits themselves to the demands of maternal practice” (O’Reilly, 2020, p. 21). Thus Encarna *becomes* a mother as she advises other travesti sex workers, raises Twinkle, and even when she adopts a male identity to legally adopt the baby, given that the state fails to recognise her travesti body as a legitimate parent. Even presenting as male, Encarna is still ‘mothering’. Therefore, although Encarna is referred to as a ‘mother, she is less of a mother than she *acts* as one, i.e., just as being travesti is an embodied experience rather than an identity, Encarna *mothers* others. This “repositioning of the word “mother” from a noun to a verb degenders motherwork” (O’Reilly, 2020, p. 22) and turns Encarna into a carer, regardless of her gender or sexual identity. If “maternal practice is characterized by three demands: preservation, growth, and social acceptance” (O’Reilly, p. 2020, p. 22), it can be argued that Encarna commits to all these parameters, particularly the last one, which becomes unattainable, as her travesti daughters are victims of constant attacks and Twinkle is bullied at school for having a travesti mother, given that “queer mothers and those who mother queerly are frequently stigmatized as morally unfit to raise children. (Park, 2020, p. 63). Eventually, Encarna commits suicide and kills Twinkle in the process, due to constant attacks and insults which make their lives unbearable, also proving that it is impossible for Encarna and Twinkle to fully embody the fantasy of a nuclear family.

Moreover, Encarna seems to embody what Ruddick (1989) defined as ‘inauthentic mothering’ (when considering ‘authentic motherhood’ as the role of the birth giver as the same as the person who raises a child), when she decides to present as male and adopt Twinkle legally, a need that arises “[o]ut of maternal powerlessness and in response to a society whose values it does not determine” (Ruddick quoted in O’Reilly, 2020, pp. 22-3), those same values that are defined “not by children’s needs but by the social groups of which a mother is a member. Social groups require that mothers shape their children’s growth in ‘acceptable’ ways” (Ruddick quoted in O’Reilly, 2020, p.22). To be Twinkle’s mother/father, Encarna must accept the values of the dominant culture, and present accordingly to her sex, even if when they are at home she presents as travesti. Moreover, Encarna is a travesti, a sex worker, and incredibly aged; neither of these is socially perceived as a synonym for ‘good mother’. Right after Encarna finds the abandoned baby,

the travestis wonder about what Encarna will suffer if she decides to keep the child, not because she is an unfit mother, but because a travesti mother is an insult to most people and institutions, meaning that “the children of prostitutes were never safe” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 32):

Travestis and children don't go together. The very sight of a travesti carrying a baby was a sin to these people. The bastards preferred to hide them from their children, to shield them from the degeneracy of which man is capable. But even though they were well aware of all this, the travestis supported Auntie Encarna in her crazy endeavor. It was the orphans' code. (2022, p. 7)

Encarna is Twinkle's mother but all the travestis take part in his upbringing, showing that they are fit to care for a child regardless of their gender presentation or occupation and “[a]fter the baby arrived we also turned ourselves into authorities on child rearing (Sosa Villada, 2022, pp. 12-3). They are also bound by the need to keep Encarna's child a secret, since “[n]o one could know that we had a baby in the house. We were fully, recklessly committed but also aware of our responsibility” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 13). Regardless of the danger, which as the novel progresses becomes ever-present and materialises in the shape of vandalism to the boarding house, police harassment, and insults, the travestis are aware that it is their responsibility, and also desire, to take care of the child in a collective act of mutual support given that “[w]e knew that nowhere else would the baby get so much attention and affection. Simply put: in Auntie Encarna's house he was loved” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 13).

Through Encarna, “the deeply adored, the unforgettable Auntie Encarna, mother of the freaks” (Sosa Villada, 2022: p. 28), *Las malas* enacts multiple types of relationality linked with nurturing and mothering, as the elderly travesti “introduces forms of solidarity and kinship that radically break with the schemes that place the fate of travestis in the only path of fatality” (Wetzel, 2020, p. 56).⁵ Through the ritualistic acts of breastfeeding and giving birth, Sosa Villada questions the so-called naturalness they are marked by, while also providing a new language to acts of nurturing and caring that denaturalizes certain discourses around womanly embodiment, mothering, and childrearing. Encarna performs a type of motherhood outside the matrix of heteronormativity, through acts of mothering that are enacted while aware of the performativity that is demanded from ‘good’ mothers, exaggerating in her acts just as it is expected of one:

Her maternal instincts were theatrical but took control of her character so thoroughly that they felt authentic. She overreacted like a mother, she was cruel like a mother. She was easily offended and quick to anger. (Sosa Villada, 2022, pp. 11-12)

5. Home is Where the Hatred is

For Camila and the other travestis, Encarna stands as the opposite of a biological mother. Although hardened by life, Encarna still manages to love the other travestis; for them, there was “no choice but to love our mother. Nothing was as beautiful as her” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 69). At the same time, although they cannot deny their love for Encarna, they also find it hard to deny the love their own “blood mothers, the monsters who had driven us crazy” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 69) for it is indeed hard to forget the family, although what Encarna produces in the travestis is certainly less resentful than what they feel towards their blood mothers. For her daughters, Encarna, “who bore the hatred of the

⁵ My translation.

world on her shoulders”, stands as a mother who cares, protects, and nurtures, linked to them through the common experience of being exiled from a blood family; Encarna “was far worthier of our love even if she could be a bitch and a despot, a desperate, lonely woman capable of anything. The woman who fed us when the rest of the world chased us away” (Sosa Villada, 2022, pp. 69).

In contrast to the love and support she finds at Encarna’s home, Camila evokes the home where she grew up and how her parents, in the shape of a nuclear patriarchal family, only managed to hurt her. Butler writes that “[v]ariations on kinship that depart from normative, dyadic heterosexually based family forms secured through the marriage vow are figured (...) as dangerous for the child”, although it is clear that Encarna’s children are well taken care of by her, who is the one who takes care of the emotional and physical injuries they sustained as non-normative children in heterosexual households. Moreover, these same variations of family structures are deemed to be “perilous to the putative natural and cultural laws said to sustain human intelligibility” (2002, p. 16), which explains why Encarna needs to become ‘human’ again by assimilating to one of the two sexes recognized by the state to claim Twinkle as hers. As Ahmed writes, “[a]ssimilation and transgression are not choices that are available to individuals, but are effects of how subjects can and cannot inhabit social norms and ideals” (2014, p. 153), and to ensure that Twinkle is not taken from her, Encarna must ‘inhabit’ the social norms and ideals that legally allow her to adopt him.

The scenes of domestic bliss at Encarna’s house, where the travesti “fell asleep to the sound of Encarna’s lullaby” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p.10) become even more intimate and powerful when compared to the extremely disturbing images of Camila’s family home, one “marked by the stain of my father’s alcoholism, a family in disgrace” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 61). Camila’s family, with its well-defined gender roles and sexual identities, cannot accept the travesti body of Camila, whose crying while presenting as a boy was perceived as unmanly. The travesti body is deemed as incompatible with both the previous and the following generations, as a source of confusion for both parents and children, given that their unintelligible and unreadable bodies are impossible to explain through the linguistic codes of gender and family. As Sosa Villada writes, “[a]s you know, a travesti is very hard to explain, everyone says so. Travestis are just as hard to explain to parents as they are to children” (2022, p. 145). For Camila’s parents, their “fat, effeminate son who didn’t know how to look after himself, who preferred to stay inside watching TV or reading a book to playing football with the other neighborhood boys” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 61-2) is a source of shame. Had the young Camila known “how to defend himself (...) how to play football” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 62), had a girlfriend, or resorted to violence upon others instead of crying, he would have been accepted within the family:

When I was four, six, ten, I cried in fear. I’d learned to cry in silence. At home, with a father like mine, crying was forbidden. You could bite your tongue, take out your anger chopping firewood, get into fights with neighborhood kids, or punch the walls, but never cry. And especially not cry in fear. So I learned to cry in silence, in the bathroom, in my bedroom, or on the way to school. It was a private act only allowed to women. Crying. I reveled in my tears, they made me the protagonist of my own queer melodrama.

How could one not cry when their father always drank too much? What else could you do but learn to cry? (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 39)

Due to this abuse, and the shame that her parents feel towards her, Camila finds herself also rejecting her family, as she fails to be a part of ‘the pact’ her parents had made, which is fitting in according to one’s gender expectations:

But I was ashamed of them too. Ashamed of our poverty, of how far removed we were from beauty, of my father's drunken binges in full view of the entire town, of having to work from the age of eight as a street vendor, of my father's need to have a son who was good for something. I didn't belong to that family, I was exiled because of who I was, I wasn't mentioned in the pact my parents had made. (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 62)

By suffering at home, and seeing her father and mother hit each other, Camila realises that she will not allow herself to be a man and perpetuate her father's male inheritance of violence, homophobia, and misogyny. Instead of becoming the 'man of the house', Camila endures the post-generational trauma that she inherited from her mother, and other women in patriarchal households, who are victims of violence. For Camila, "[e]verything is a reflection", and her adult life is a mirror of what she experienced growing up, as the violence of the household conditions her adulthood: "I seek out violence, I provoke it, I douse myself in it like a baptismal font. I'm a prostitute who walks the street at night when other women my age are in bed" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 40-1). Although she tries to contradict the violence that was inflicted upon her, Camila finds herself participating "in the patterns of violence into which I was born, the traditional ritual of returning to one's parents, reviving the same corpse every night" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 41), perpetuating an inheritance of family trauma. Camila claims that her identity as a travesti is a direct result of her upbringing, of a "violent childhood, with a father who needed only the least excuse to throw at me whatever he had in hand, who took off his belt to deal out punishment, who grew angry and lashed out at everything around him" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 41). Camila turned into a woman "out of sheer need" (2022, p. 41): with a father who was a "ferocious animal, the ghost that haunted me, my nightmare", and as "it was all too awful to want to be a man", Camila decided that she "didn't want to be a man in this world" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 41), and refuses to participate in a patriarchal structure in which the only role available for men is to be a violent father who is unaccepting of his queer son.

"I don't know the words father and mother. I have no parents. I'm dead to them" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 141), says Patricia, another travesti: "her parents hated her for being gay" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 141) and she ran away from home at fourteen, after the death of her sister, whose name she symbolically adopts. *Las malas* is another of many narratives that describe the rejection that queer people suffer by their blood families, and their attempts at correcting what is perceived as deviant gender identities and sexual orientations, a rejection that, in the case of Camila is double-sided, first as she is seen as a gay boy, then as a travesti:

My mother burdened with a child who was beginning to disappoint her, poor mother: the effeminate boy who wouldn't be broken by the belt, by punishments, by the screams and slaps with which they sought to cure the horror. The horror of having a faggot son. And even worse: the faggot had become a travesti. Horror of horrors. (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 41)

With Camila's upbringing, Sosa Villada offers a poignant comment on how nuclear family making is an enforcement of gender roles and expectations upon every member of the family and how alternative families, such as the one that Camila finds in Encarna become the actual safe spaces and networks of care that blood families should provide.

6. Mothers-By-Law

By the end of the novel Encarna, who is constantly being threatened, legally adopts Twinkle: by using the state's blindness towards gender non-conforming bodies, Encarna

creates a link with Twinkle that is legally recognised as valid, allowing her to be the ‘father’ of the child to the state and his mother at home. Although Encarna and Twinkle are everything but a heteronormative nuclear family (a travesti adopting a child who has been abandoned), Encarna makes use of the law’s inability to read her travesti body to ensure legal rights over Twinkle, who cannot be taken away from Encarna, sustaining that “kinship does not work, or does not qualify as kinship, unless it assumes a recognizable family form” (Butler, 2002, p. 14). Nevertheless, when Encarna presents as male to leave the house and safely take Twinkle to school, she is still the child’s mother, reconciling the performance of masculinity and the act of mothering in the same body, proving that “[m]others with queer gender identities further trouble cultural ideals of motherhood by troubling the father/mother dichotomy itself” (Park, 2020, p. 63).

By taking advantage of state laws, and the recognition of a family only by blood or legal links, Encarna manages to secure her family’s well-being, sustaining that “[t]o be legitimated by the state is to enter into the terms of legitimation offered there” (Butler, 2002, p. 17). Camila describes coming across Encarna’s male body as a shock: she sees “a man walking down the street holding the hand of a boy dressed in checked kindergarten overalls” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 158) and only realises that the man is her mother when she Encarna whispers Camila’s name in her ear. Camila “stared at them in surprise and suddenly recognized our mother under a face fuzzed up by a beard and baggy clothes that didn’t quite conceal her breasts” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 158-9). Regardless of the initial shock, Camila manages to find her mother in the bearded face of Encarna, who, only after closing the gate behind her, and safe from the external world, “removed her male disguise and made a snack for her son” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 159). Encarna then explains “that she dressed like that to take him to kindergarten, so people wouldn’t start asking questions” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 159), to ensure that Twinkle is safe. She also explains to Camila that she registered Twinkle as her son, after claiming that she was a widower and that Twinkle’s mother had died in childbirth, a curious choice of narrative given that Encarna also has to somehow kill her travesti identity to be able to claim that Twinkle is hers; but this metaphorical death was worthy, as Encarna “[n]ow she had a legitimate son, his adoption was a historical fact” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 69-70). Even if the arguments against queer family making are often made under a cover of concern for the safety of the child, intended to disguise the homophobia and transphobia that fuel them, it is clear that mother-father Encarna does not pose any type of trouble for Twinkle. When the child draws Encarna, he does it “in every color (...) a man and a woman with him in the middle holding both their hands. He’d drawn himself firing golden rays from his heart like the sun” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 160). Twinkle’s drawing encompasses Encarna’s male and female identities, the mother that she is allowed to be in the domestic space and the father that she is in public, embodying ancient gender roles to be able to have her family. Even Twinkle is aware that he must preserve his mother’s safety, by assimilating to what is expected of him as a son: “[o]ut there he [Twinkle] always calls me [Encarna] Daddy and in here I’m Mommy” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 160).

As previously argued regarding inauthentic motherhood, Encarna must accept the values of the dominant society to have rights over Twinkle’s life and to be perceived, and legally defined, as a fit mother. Encarna adapts and assimilates, having finally “gone respectable” by “living the life of a chameleon, adapting to the world as it is” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 160). For Twinkle, who is aware that he must hide his mother’s identity, Encarna’s gender-bending does not pose a challenge, a clear comment on how the resistance to family diversity and household plurality does not stem from the need to ensure the child’s security, but from a fear of challenging the myth of heteronormativity. Twinkle even considers himself particularly fortunate given that he has in Encarna a

nuclear family of a mother and a father in the same body, and both take care of him: “[s]he’s my mommy and my daddy. Not many children are so lucky” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 160). However, to Camila, it seems reductive to call Encarna and Twinkle a family, a word heavy with trauma, eliciting the need for new vocabulary to describe household diversity and kinship outside heteronormative structures:

I thought about how the love in every family eventually breaks down. But they weren’t a family. The word was too insignificant for what they were. Their love was much greater, it was all the empathy of which humans are capable. (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 160)

Therefore, why do discourses on relationality and community insist on ‘family’? Why “does the nuclear family continue to dominate kinship relations when in reality people are enmeshed in multiple and complex systems of relation?” (Halberstam, 2007, p. 316). More than “new models of family” or “the recognition of friendship ties as kinship” (Halberstam, 2007, p. 317), alternative kinship systems must forget the family entirely “to allow for the possibility of other modes of relating, belonging, caring” (Halberstam, 2007: p. 316). Furthermore, “the word ‘families’ may be too saturated with affects to be usable” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 154). Although Billard’s article on *Las malas* proposes that these travesti networks of protection and survival can be perceived as families of “replacement”, it seems to be rather more productive, and far less traumatic for those rejected by their blood relatives, to not just merely replace the ‘family’ but to completely discard it, as a substitution of one for the other can still entail the inheritance of patriarchal structures marked by violence and rejection. Moreover, if travesti bodies do not fit the model of the heterosexual family, which works as a site of trauma, why replace it? What is proposed through this article’s analysis of *Las malas* is that these networks are defined and put into practice outside the matrix of the family and its definitions of gender roles, inheritance, reproduction, authority, and punishment. The novel proposes the existence of a liminal space for both the travesti body and the travesti family, a space beyond dichotomies with which the novel directly engages, “dichotomous notions such as ‘original sex’ versus copy (trans*-travesti), normalized body versus monstrous body, hegemonic family versus non-normative family” (Osoreo, 2021, p. 137).⁶ Even Encarna, with her impossible age, seems to be in between life and death, giving body and *encarnando* a travesti version of Difunta Correa, who kept feeding her baby from a breast that never went dry even after dying.

Over time, Encarna fully commits to raising Twinkle in a house that is constantly being graffitied with insults, which people try to burn down, and stops leaving the house; at the same time, the travestis face more challenges, such as violence, police harassment, HIV infection, and death, and stop visiting their mother. The park is also constantly patrolled to drive the travestis away; “when we lost the Park we lost a support network that came just from being there all together” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 166), claims Camila, and this marks a shift in the treatment of the travestis:

They didn’t want any of us to survive. One was stoned to death. Another was burned alive, like a witch: she had gas poured over her and was set alight by the side of the road. More and more disappeared. There was a monster out there, a monster who fed on travestis. We were just disappearing overnight. (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 186)

And yet, Encarna still forgives them for having abandoned her, claiming that Twinkle will not learn hate from his mother, as she tries to teach Twinkle to be kinder than the world has been to her, breaking a chain of family trauma:

⁶ My translation.

I don't want my son believing that his mother repays shit with more shit. I want him to learn to repay shit with flowers, I want him to know that flowers grow out of shit. (...) My son won't learn about the miseries of the world from his mother. (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 164)

7. Parallel Mothers

Las malas features two moments of birthgiving: one performed by Laura, a sex worker who is pregnant and the only cisgender woman in Encarna's family, and another when Encarna finds Twinkle in the park. While the former is a physical experience, the latter is a symbolic act of connection between mother and son. The juxtaposing of Laura and Encarna is meant to show how both experiences of mothering, albeit through different processes, are equally valid. Although distinct in their characteristics (unproductive/reproductive), both Encarna and Laura are capable, in their ways, of having children and raising them:

Auntie Encarna believed that travestis were barren, dried up like a forgotten creek. The only fertile one among us, the only one who had had two little chicks secretly whisked into her belly by a person or persons unknown, was Laura. (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 33)

Just as the travestis take care of Twinkle, they also gather to witness the birth of Laura's children, "clutching every talisman we could lay our hands on" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 31). To describe the scene of Laura's labour, Sosa Villada recurs to the image of Jesus' birth, inscribing Laura in an ancient lineage of women giving birth, while also queering the nativity scene itself: the travestis are "the wise women" who "arrived with (...) gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but also palo santo (...) marijuana (...)" as the mother "thanked all of us shepherdesses for being there, for having followed the star" (Sosa Villada, 2022, pp. 31-2) claiming that "it was the happiest day of her life because we were all there" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 34). The labour is assisted by Nadina, a travesti sex worker who is a nurse by day. Eventually, Nadina and Laura become a couple and leave the family and the city to raise Laura's children together. Through this unexpected couple, *Las malas* expands the family project to two women, one travesti and one cisgender, who form a family, embracing the plurality of these bodies, while questioning what is perceived as the natural aspect of heteronormativity. Through Nadina and Laura's romance, "kindled as natural and respectful as any we'd ever seen", *Las malas* shows how the constrictions of heterosexual relationships are transgressed in Encarna's family, especially due to the plurality of identities that a body can entail, given that "Laura had fallen in love with the nurse, but also her friend from the street, and they just happened to inhabit the same body" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 34). However, the dangerous life of the park has to end for Nadina and Laura, given that they have children to take care of; like Encarna, they must ensure the safety and material conditions that are necessary to raise children, as the presence of a dependent individual automatically enforces the adoption of a "respectable" life. This implies, just as Encarna did, that "Laura never went back to the Park (...) so she could stay at home with her children" and Nadina adopts the children as "[t]hey both took Nadina's surname and she officially recognized them as the father" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 35). Even though "the two women lay in bed with the babies between them, watched soap operas, and talked about us, the girls they'd left behind in the Park, telling each other that they should invite us for dinner the following night" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 35), creating a scene of domesticity, this nuclear family includes a travesti who adopts a

cisgender woman's children, after having worked together as sex workers, showing that even heteronormativity is a performance.

Side by side with the technical description of Laura's labour, one finds the lyrical metaphorical scene of the moment when Encarna finds Twinkle:

She gets scratched as she reaches down to rescue the child from his tomb of thorns. Her skin starts to bleed, staining the cuffs of her blouse. (...) She feels no pain, doesn't even notice the cuts. She keeps pulling away the brambles and eventually gets to the child, who is still howling into the night. He's covered in shit, the stink is unbearable. Gagging and bleeding, Auntie Encarna hugs him close to her chest and starts to call to her friends. (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 4)

Through the description of body fluids, and the pain inflicted on Encarna's body, Sosa Villada manages to create a scene that acquires a certain level of similarity to an actual birth. Although hurt, Encarna does not feel pain due to the happiness of "giving birth" to a child and just like Laura, she shares the moment with her family of friends. Twinkle's birth is metaphorical but not less important than the one of Laura's children as *Las malas* queers the language of birth giving and maternity to give Encarna a symbolic moment of labouring, as "to save the boy from death (...) allows her [Encarna] the "miracle" of giving life through a symbolic birth, that is, to be a mother regardless of the limits that biology imposes on her body" (Billard, 2022, p. 219).⁷

For Encarna, although Laura carried and birthed her children, what she did was similar in relevance and symbolic meaning: "*I gave birth to you too (...) but through a path of thorns and blood. I too screamed in pain when I brought you into the world*" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 32-3). However, Encarna is aware of how an adopted child is perceived when against a biological child, and how she will face more challenges than Twinkle's mother when it comes to their validation, aware that Laura is a 'normal' mother, unlike her. Encarna "cried and cried as though she felt guilty for not being that kind of mother (...) As though it pained her that Laura was giving birth the way people normally gave birth" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 33). Through 'giving birth' to Twinkle, Encarna's body becomes alive – (re)productive – as the child "*brought my flesh back to life because it was completely dead*" (Sosa Villada, 2022, 33). Although aware that her birth and Laura's are different experiences, and that their children are linked to them in distinct ways, Encarna tells Twinkle that "*I am just as much your mother, even though I don't have an open wound between my legs*" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 33).

Sosa Villada also juxtaposes Encarna and Laura through another ritual of mothering: breastfeeding. Again, taking the language reserved for the experience of bodies that can carry children, Sosa Villada resignifies it by transforming the barren body of Encarna into a place of nurturing, here represented not through giving birth, but by feeding a child. Instead of milk, Encarna will feed Twinkle with safety and care; her body is composed of different fluids but still she manages to nurture "a newborn with a breast full of aircraft oil" (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 8). For the child, the act is one of comfort and not necessarily of feeding, showing how Encarna carries out acts of mothering that both child and mother enjoy, albeit considered unproductive under a logic reserved for cisgender bodies:

Auntie Encarna bared her silicon breast and brought the baby to it. The boy sniffed the giant, hard tit and calmly latched on. He wasn't going to get a drop of milk out of that nipple but the travesti in whose arms he rested pretended to nurse him, singing a lullaby. You've never truly slept unless you've fallen asleep to a lullaby sung by a travesti. (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 8)

⁷ My translation.

The act of nursing the child is equally gratifying for both mother and son, as Encarna finds herself “a couple of inches away from the bliss into which her whole body was settling” given that “the boy was drawing a lifetime’s worth of pain out of her (...) the pleasure and pain of being drained by a kid. A painful injection of peace” (Sosa Villada, 2022, pp. 8-9). When asked what she is doing, given that she is nursing a child with a dried breast, she answers that the act is “symbolic” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 9), that Encarna is feeding Twinkle just as many other women have through history, becoming “[t]he symbol of a woman obeying the urges of her body, like Romulus, Remus, and Luperca” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 9). With milk made of aircraft oil, semen, ink, and blood infected with viruses, the travestis of *Las malas* create their own bodies and the links between each other, links of caring, pleasure, and pain, in a family in which they are “daughters of the same mother, (...) born to the same beast and drunk the same milk: that of our mother who gave birth to bitches and prostitutes, to pigs” and even though they were “[b]arren, bitter, parched, bad, ruined, lonely, sly, witchy, infertile bodies of the earth” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 69), they somehow managed to give birth to one another.

8. Conclusion

Las malas offers a multifaceted look at how kinship is made and performed, from legal bonds to ancient informal practices of caring for the most vulnerable. Through both assimilation and transgression, Encarna and her family draw attention to the performative aspect of heteronormativity itself, while proposing that relationality and the creation of networks of care must stand beyond and outside the family. For the people featured in *Las malas*, the act of making kin against death and societal and family rejection is in itself transgressive, as they are expected to stay in the margins, abandoned and alone. To keep claiming that nuclear families are the norm seems to sustain a structure that is but a myth: even heterosexual families are composed of divorced parents, women who work outside the house, stepparents, children born out of wedlock, single parents, unmarried people with and without children, childless people with pets, people who adopted underage family members... The list of ways people have found to connect over time is endless.

When the nuclear family home presents itself as imposing a reproductive timeline in which queer and travesti family members do not fit in, it is in alternative structures of care that these individuals find their place. Making family may or may not include blood-related kinship, it may or may not include relations established by the law, but it certainly includes the performance of acts of care and the promise of material and emotional security to those who need it, regardless of age, gender, or sexual orientation. By questioning the family, *Las malas* also questions what is a mother, and who is allowed to be one, by disconnecting the act of caring from sex and gender, while denaturalizing caring and child-rearing as a maternal act. Encarna’s sterile body does not ‘re-produce’, as that would entail a repetition of the damage inflicted by the blood family on the travestis; rather, she ‘produces’ a new type of relationality, one that distances itself from the shape of the family.

Las malas proposes a challenge to a sense of family that is equated with neoliberal capitalist non-feminist hierarchical structures of care, in favour of a rhizomatic matrix of connections and types of kinship that stretch out just like the roots of Encarna’s family tree, as her body, deemed to be sterile, manages to produce a family of freaks. Sosa Villada’s novel offers a crucial look at the lives of travestis from within, of people who get together at dark parks to defend each other from violent clients, who reunite in

makeshift operating rooms to celebrate the births of children, who meet at the hospital to nurse those dying with AIDS, and to attend many, many funerals, where “those of us who are left behind embroider our death shrouds with sequins” (Sosa Villada, 2022, p. 1165) with threads of grief and love.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (2014). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Billard, H. (2022). La representación de las prácticas queer y la resignificación de la noción de familia en dos novelas argentinas recientes: *Soy lo que quieras llamarme* y *Las malas*. *Whatever: A transdisciplinary journal of queer theories and studies*, 5, pp.209-222.
- Bradway, T. & Freeman, E. (2022) Introduction. In Bradway T. & Freeman E. (Eds.) *Queer kinship: race, sex, belonging, form*. (pp. 1-25). Duke University Press.
- Butler, J. (2002) Is kinship always already heterosexual?. *differences*, 13 (1): 14–44. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-13-1-14>
- Gallego Cuiñas, A. (2022). Contra el canon: la narrativa de vanguardia de Camila Sosa Villada. *Revista Telar*. ISSN 1668-3633, (29), 69-88.
- Galligo Wetzel, A. (2020) Formas de la aparición en *Las malas* de Camila Sosa Villada; Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. *Núcleo Onetti de estudos latino-americanos*; Landa; 8; 2; 6-2020; 51-78.
- Gamba, A. M. (2023). El barroco maravilloso de *Las malas*: nuevas aproximaciones a la tradición desde la literatura del presente. *Caracol*, 25, 235-263. <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2317-9651.i25p235-263>
- Halberstam, J. (2007) Forgetting family: queer alternatives to Oedipal relations. In Haggerty, G. E. & McGarry, M. (Eds.) *A companion to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer studies*. (pp. 315-324) Blackwell.
- _____ (2005). *In a queer time and place: Transgender bodies, subcultural lives*. New York University Press.
- Medeiros, R. F. (2021). Sejamos cúmplices da construção de possíveis futuros: Travesti – *una teoría lo suficientemente buena*. *Revista brasileira de literatura comparada*, 23 (44). 253-253. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2596-304x20212344rfm>
- Mochkofsky, G. (2022, March 23). A novel and the fight for transgender rights in Argentina. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/a-novel-and-the-fight-for-transgender-rights-in-argentina>
- Moszczyńska-Dürst, K. . (2021). Entre la crisis de lo "humano", la autoficción trans(fuga) y el "arte queer del fracaso": *Las malas* de Camila Sosa Villada . *Pasavento: Revista de estudios hispánicos*, 9(2), 309-322. <https://doi.org/10.37536/preh.2021.9.2.1058>
- Moya, M. (2023). “La casa de la compasión”: apuntes sobre lo fantástico, la tradición y el mundo trans en un cuento de Camila Sosa Villada. *Caracol*, 25, 264-295. <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2317-9651.i25p264-295>

- O'Reilly, A. (2020). Maternal theory: Patriarchal motherhood and empowered mothering. In Hallstein, L. O., O'Reilly, A. & Giles, M. V. (Eds.). *The Routledge companion to motherhood*. Routledge.
- Osores, I. S. (2021). Desencantos y maravillas: comunidad, fracaso y utopía queer en *Las malas* de Camila Sosa Villada. *Chasqui*, 50(1), 133–152. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27120877>
- Park, S. M. (2020). Queering and querying motherhood. In Hallstein, L. O., O'Reilly, A. & Giles, M. V. (Eds.). *The Routledge companion to motherhood*. Routledge.
- Pierce, J. (2020). I monster: Embodying trans and travesti resistance in Latin America. *Latin American research review*, 55(2), 305–321. <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.563>
- Rich, A. (1976). *Of woman born: Motherhood as experience and institution*. W. W. Norton.
- Rizki, C. (2020a). Familiar grammars of loss and belonging: curating trans kinship in post-dictatorship Argentina. *Journal of visual culture*, 19(2), 197–211. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412920941905>
- _____. (2019) Latin/x American trans studies: Toward a *travesti*-trans analytic. *TSQ*. 6 (2), 145–155. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-7348426>
- _____. (2020b). “No state apparatus goes to bed genocidal then wakes up democratic”: Fascist ideology and transgender politics in post-dictatorship Argentina. *Radical history review* 1 October 2020; 2020 (138): 82–107. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-8359271>
- Rose, M. M. (2019). Giuseppe Campuzano's afterlife: toward a travesti methodology for critique, care, and radical resistance. *TSQ*. 6 (2): 239–253. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-7348524>
- Ruddick, S. (1989). *Maternal thinking: Toward a politics of peace*. Beacon Press.
- Simonetto, P., & Butierrez, M. (2023). The archival riot: Travesti/trans* audiovisual memory politics in twenty-first-century Argentina. *Memory studies*, 16(2), 280–295. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980211073099>
- Sosa, C. (2011). Queering acts of mourning in the aftermath of Argentina's dictatorship: The mothers of Plaza de Mayo and *Los rubios*. In F. Lessa & V. Druliolle (Eds), *The memory of state terrorism in the Southern Cone*. (pp. 63–85). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sosa, L. (2020). Now you see me? The visibility of trans and travesti experiences in criminal procedures. *Politics and governance*, 8(3), 266–277.
- Sosa Villada Villada, C. (2022). *Bad girls* (Kit Maude, Trans.). New York: Other Press.
- Venturini X. (2023). Autobiografía y cruce en *Las malas* de Camila Sosa Villada. *Anales de literatura hispanoamericana*, 51, 221–232. <https://doi.org/10.5209/alhi.85136>