Horror as Real and the Real as Horror: Ghosts of the *Desaparecidos* in Argentina

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HORROR AS REAL AND THE REAL AS HORROR: GHOSTS OF THE *DESAPARECIDOS* IN ARGENTINA*

Abstract: This article explores the fear of political otherness in Mariana Enríquez's short story "The Inn" in which the author combines the reality of Argentine history with elements of the gothic horror style while maintaining a sharp focus on social criticism. "The Inn" blurs the lines between the reality of a not-so-distant past and elements of the supernatural to delve into an Argentine history scarred by the last dictatorship. This article seeks to examine the use of the figure of the *desaparecido* as representative of a politics of erasure of the political other that has been systematically censored and unacknowledged. It is also an examination of the re-membering and re-inscribing of the *desaparecido* as an intergenerational cultural exercise to counteract an institutionalized narrative of erasure and forgetting.

Keywords: Argentina, disappeared, haunted geography, Mariana Enríquez, memory, spectral spaces.

HORROR COMO REALIDADE E REALIDADE COMO HORROR: FANTASMAS DOS DESAPARECIDOS NA ARGENTINA

Resumo: Este artigo explora o medo da alteridade política no conto de Mariana Enríquez "A estalagem", no qual a autora combina a realidade da história argentina com elementos do horror gótico, enquanto mantém um foco nítido na crítica social. "A estalagem" confunde as linhas entre a realidade de um passado não tão distante e os elementos do sobrenatural para mergulhar numa história argentina marcada pela sua última ditadura. Este artigo procura examinar o uso da figura do desaparecido como representante de uma política de apagamento de uma outra política que tem sido sistematicamente censurada e não reconhecida. É também uma análise da recordação e reinscrição do desaparecido enquanto exercício cultural intergeracional que contraria uma narrativa institucionalizada de apagamento e esquecimento.

Palavras-chave: Argentina, desaparecidos, espaços espectrais, geografia assombrada, Mariana Enríquez, memória.

* An initial shorter version of this paper is published in Bacon (2019).

[...] when faced with real horrors,
we realize we're totally powerless.
MARIANA ENRÍQUEZ (*in* RICE, 2018)

INTRODUCTION: ARGENTINE HORROR AND SOCIAL CRITICISM

Mariana Enríquez (Buenos Aires, 1973-) is a journalist and writer who combines in her horror fiction the reality of Argentine history with elements of the gothic horror style while maintaining a sharp focus on social criticism. Her writing brings to life the terrible elements of a not-so-distant past marked by its last dictatorship (1976-1983), clandestine torture centres, *desaparecidos* [disappeared] and children taken from their mothers while they were political prisoners to be adopted out to “good” (military) families. Horror is real and the real is horror in Enríquez’s *Things We Lost in the Fire: Stories* a collection of short stories characterized by elements of the supernatural that delve into dark history and realities of Argentina from a past scarred by dictatorships to contemporary issues such as femicides,¹ poverty, misogyny, and corruption.

Enríquez’s version of horror has been tagged as a type of literary horror in which “the genre explodes with a quotidian strangeness and departure from the norm” (Pardo, 2016).² The genre opens up in Enríquez’s short story collection *The Things We Lost in the Fire* (2017; translated by Megan McDowell)³ to include an exploration of the macabre and the supernatural while also examining the real horror of living through the patriarchy as well as dark periods of Argentina’s history. Enríquez writes a “cocktail of politics and cult horror” (Bett, 2017) that exists in the blurred space between fiction and historical reality – a horror genre that reclaims, reminds and memorializes a shameful national history as well as an ignored contemporary reality of poverty, personal relationships and social inequality. Horror is not situational violence but rather a style of writing that allows Enríquez to trigger her reader’s imagination with superstitious repertoires as well as a touch of discomfort because of its level of verisimilitude with everyday life (Orosz, 2009).

In order to fully comprehend the reality of the haunting described in the short story “The Inn” one needs to appreciate that Enríquez is writing a genre of Argentine horror linked to politics – it is a joining of political literature (such as testimonial literature) and horror. Heraldo Alfredo Pastor situates Enríquez’s writing as part of “Nueva Narrativa Argentina” [New Argentine Narrative] that emerged after the last military dictatorship in Argentina in which

¹ According to the Argentine women’s right group, *La Casa del Encuentro*, 2,384 femicides have been documented in Argentina during 2008-2016; an average of 300 per year (McNamara, 2017).

² In the original: “explota el género como extrañeza cotidiana y desvío de la norma”. All English translations of Spanish texts are mine unless otherwise noted.

³ Original Spanish title *Todo lo que perdimos en el fuego* (2016); this is Enríquez’s first title to be translated into English.

[...] Argentina has not been able to separate the political factor from the configuration of its literature; and it seems to have validated itself on the discursive conventions of terror as genre and its antecedent, the gothic, as deemed appropriate to represent a terror of a political nature. (Pastor, 2012: 68)⁴

Pastor adds that it is better said that Argentine horror literature *participates* in the horror genre because of its intrinsic relationship to the real terror of Argentine history and politics. When brought into her own writing Enríquez further explains that the

[...] border appears in the frontier between realism and the fantastic, that not-so-comfortable place where you recognize the setting and the words but reality dissolves into something sinister. I always find that the most interesting (and scary) horror lies in these kinds of narratives, the ones that work along this line. (Enríquez *in* Rice, 2018)

Enríquez discloses that she writes about the real horror of the 1970s Buenos Aires, the 1980s and the fall of the economy, as well as the “false” hope of a brighter Argentine future of the 1990s and the “frights” of the 2000s – all with the intention of relieving herself of these “nightmares” (Enríquez, 2017). She does so by blurring the lines between fantasy and reality and creating a literary geography that “filters the erased national history, ‘the dark side of a proud Argentina’” (Pardo, 2016).⁵

Furthermore, Argentine horror is a genre that mixes with other genres such as gothic-horror and with a focus on politics and a history of state repression (Ansolabehere and Torre, 2012). To best comprehend the reality of the “fictional” Argentine horror one needs to understand the way in which the last dictatorship devised and used fear as a psychological weapon against its political opponents. Let us recall that this was a period of state terrorism marked by death squads and torturing of “guerrillas”, their sympathizers as well as members of the political and social opposition. It is also a time in which children were separated from their imprisoned “subversive” mothers and adopted out secretly to “good” military families.⁶ In a 2017 interview with NPR Books Enríquez reveals:

⁴ In the original: “[...] la Argentina no ha podido abstraerse del factor político en la configuración de su literatura; y pareciera haberse valido de las convenciones discursivas del terror como género y de su antecedente, el gótico, percibidas como apropiadas para representar un terror de naturaleza política”.

⁵ In the original: “filtr[a] la historia nacional borrada, ‘el lado oscuro de la orgullosa Argentina’”.

⁶ The 1985 Argentine film *La historia oficial* – directed by Luis Puenzo and produced by Historias Cinematográficas – documents the story of a high school teacher that sets out to find the biological parents of her adopted daughter after she discovers the questionable conditions of her adoption.

But what always haunted me once I knew the stories of these children is that there's a question of identity. I mean, I went to school with children that I don't know if they were who they were, if their parents were who they were raised by their parents or by the killers to other families. So there is a ghostly quality to everyday life. (*in* NPR Books, 2017).

Although there is a movement to reunite these “adopted” children with their biological families via DNA testing, the psycho-emotional implications for some of these children outweigh identifying their biological parents. A debate has emerged whether these children (now adults) should be permitted to refuse the DNA testing which, in turn, would affect the surviving family members by not knowing the biological child of their own disappeared or dead loved one.⁷ What emerges is a haunting intricate labyrinth of “not knowing” – or the “ghostly quality to [Argentine] everyday life” described by Enríquez above.

According to Katherine McKittrick (2006, ix) “geography is always human and that humanness is always geographic”. By extension, geographic stories reveal not only the subject's imaginative space but also how geography, especially a haunted and/or demonic geography, has the possibility to speak for itself. Considering that “space and place are merely containers for human complexities and social relations”, they also form the “anchors of selfhood” against the socio-political processes of concealment and marginalization (*ibidem*: xi). Space not only anchors the self in history but can also be the same space through which hardship and human cruelty can be revealed and articulated (*ibidem*: xii). Within this dynamic of haunted geography, the past and present can also be linked as sites of struggle and even of unresolved stories – such as the case of the *desaparecidos* in the short story “The Inn”. It also intrinsically becomes a terrain for struggle for remembering and acknowledgment against dominant socio-political practices and discourses of disenfranchisement and erasure.

Enríquez (*in* Rice, 2018) reveals in an interview with *Literary Hub* how she believes that “political violence leaves scars, like national PTSD [posttraumatic stress disorder]” marked by clandestine concentration camps and detention centres. She also remarks that

There's something about the scale of the cruelty in political violence from the state [sic] that always seems like the blackest magic to me. Like they have to satisfy

⁷ See Guillermo Wulff (2014).

some ravenous and ancient god that demands not only bodies but needs to be fed their suffering as well. (Enríquez *in* Rice, 2018)

Geography becomes “integral to social struggles” and when considering the spectral spaces described by Enríquez in “The Inn” they also reveal what McKittrick (2006: xxvi) has described as: “[...] practices of domination are in close contact with alternative geographic perspectives and spatial matters that may not necessarily replicate what we think we know, or have been taught, about our surroundings”. Recognizing at the same time that haunted geographies such as the Inn also include what McKittrick has termed as concealed and expendable human geographies (*ibidem*: xxxi). It is in the recovery of the hidden histories of past detention centres and concentration camps, such as the Inn, that the bodies of the *desaparecidos* become re-mapped onto the space via an ontological memorialization of previously erased human cartographies.

Part of this inherited human cartography includes how the tragic figure of the *desaparecido* became institutionalized in Argentine history. In 1979, ex-general Jorge Videla defined the *desaparecido* as:

The disappeared are an unknown. If they reappeared they would receive treatment X, and if their disappearance became definitive in the certainty of their death, they would receive treatment Z. But while they are disappeared, they can't have any special treatment, they are unknown entity, neither dead nor alive, they are disappeared. (*apud* Hernández, 2009: 1)⁸

Videla's description of the *desaparecido* underlines both the fear of a human being disappeared – an action of removing that person from existence without trace – but also cements the idea of those in power being able to make another person disappear. It eventually transformed in meaning from “someone alive yet missing [...] into someone dead yet unaccounted for” (Robben, 2005: 131). It is not only a process of dehumanization that erases a person's identity but the lack of a body to bury emphasizes the psychological torture on loved ones not being able to grieve or mourn. Some of Enríquez's ghosts refer back to the idea of the *desaparecido* as a political tool employed to increase the terror among the Argentine people and was the method by which the military government attempted to silence the population.⁹ The counter, or unofficial

⁸ In the original: “En cuanto éste como tal, es una incógnita eldesaparecido. Si reapareciera tendría un tratamiento X, y si la desaparición seconvirtiera en certeza de su fallecimiento tendría un tratamiento Z. Pero mientras seadesaparecido no puede tener ningún tratamiento especial, es una incógnita, es undesaparecido, no tiene entidad, no está, ni muerto ni vivo, está desaparecido.”

⁹ See Crenzel (2011), Osiel (2001), Robben (2005), Timerman (2002) and Walsh (1977).

history was, and is still today, represented especially by the survivors of clandestine detention camps and by the mothers and relatives of the political prisoners and of the *desaparecidos*.¹⁰ These family members were initially ignored by the governmental institutions, but they mobilized and gathered together in the Plaza de Mayo (main square in Buenos Aires) to denounce the human rights abuses carried out by the government against their children in attempts to have them set free or be given the truth about what happened to them.¹¹

In 1983, due to economic collapse, social turmoil and other factors the Argentinean military government was forced to call for free elections. The government, under pressure from the tenacious perseverance of the human rights organizations (Argentina League for Human Rights; Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo; Relatives of Political Prisoners and Disappeared; The Ecumenical Movement, amongst others) formed the National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP, in the Spanish acronym) to investigate the violation of human rights during the military dictatorship. Through CONADEP, the country heard “the other history”, which had been silenced for seven years, from the testimonies provided by ex-political prisoners, those who were tortured, survivors of the secret detention centres and relatives of the *desaparecidos*.

Other trials followed and the testimonies of these witnesses enabled the human rights organizations not only to take the members of the security forces to trial but also to have them incarcerated (Amnesty International, 2011). During the Kirchner governments (2003-2015) much more was achieved with respect to human rights violations – the judicial system, even without tangible proof, was able to imprison military personnel and other members of the security services. About 80 to 90% of these cases were based solely on survivor testimonies.¹² Such judicial proceedings and compilations of survivor accounts have validated the literature of testimony¹³ as a means through which to publicly acknowledge the once silent “history”. This experience showcases the value of oral and written testimonies that permit the truth to be uncovered, transforming

¹⁰ See DeMarinis and Spahr (2013), Bouvard (1994), Partnoy (1996), and Sillato (2008).

¹¹ See Bouvard (1994), and Mellibovsky (1997).

¹² See Ábalo (2013), de Marinis and Spahr (2013), and the website Familiares de Desaparecidos y Detenidos por Razones Políticas (<http://www.desaparecidos.org/familiares/>).

¹³ Scholars have claimed that, from the outset, testimony in Latin America has been a crucial means of bearing witness to human rights violations (Gugelberger, 1996). The leading definition of Latin American testimony follows as “a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet [...] form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a ‘life’ or a significant life experience” (Beverly, 1996: 24). Often the witness as narrator speaks on the behalf of the collective – as a member of this disenfranchised group – claiming some agency in the act of narrating the group’s political struggle while also calling on readers to engage and/or judge the crisis accordingly (*ibidem*: 26). John Beverly also points out that testimony “may include, but is not subsumed under, any of the following textual categories, some of which are conventionally considered literature, others not: autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, *novela-testimonio*, nonfiction novel, or ‘factographic literature’” (*ibidem*: 24-25).

the pain into concrete proof, which promotes justice and the survival of historical memory. Enríquez was born in December 1973 and was two years old when the dictatorship began, and she was 8-9 years old when news of the atrocities committed by the military began to be revealed to the public. Enríquez has stated in an interview her position with respect to the last Argentine dictatorship as one of complete repudiation of State terrorism and punishment for those responsible for and carrying out the genocide (Enríquez *in* Orosz, 2009). She has also shared that having grown up in a household well aware of what was happening in the political arena of the dictatorship – of its blatant horror – writing about the ghosts of events that form part of Argentine history seemed as her way of contributing to the discussion to the happenings of this era (*ibidem*). This historical knowledge finds its way into Enríquez's writing because in the end: "I [Enríquez] love the country [Argentina], but I think that's why I'm harsh with it... I'm harsh because I care about it and I want it to change" (Bett, 2017).

There is, therefore, a spectral quality of the *desaparecidos* in Argentina's cultural memory that Enríquez builds upon in the short story "The Inn". That is, in this short story Enríquez extrapolates the historical unaccountability of the physical body of the *desaparecido* and translates into the haunting of the Inn – a supernatural haunting that also stands in for the personal and psychological haunting for generations of Argentinians. The sense of fear and terror in the short story represents this intrinsic political awareness and underlines the effects of an intergenerational socio-political trauma compounded by the absence of knowledge of the physical landscape of the secret detention centres and concentration camps. It is an intergenerational experience of a psychological horror of a "not-knowing" where traumatized relatives of the *desaparecidos* are denied the knowledge of the whereabouts of their disappeared loved ones to the clandestine concentration and internment sites after their kidnapping by the armed forces. It is important to note that this haunting has been facilitated by an institutionalized denial and code of silence of those who were in power. On-going investigations were further revealing of the violence and injustice committed at these sites, thereby adding to the complexities of the "working-through" process for survivors and their families. This process of the corporealization of the *desaparecido* into official history then intrinsically affects the inherited trauma of a collective cultural space. Enríquez explains that, unlike journalism which tends to reveal more urgent in the moment reporting, fiction can make one "think in the long term or a very profound way" (*ibidem*). Considering her own role as a cultural journalist, Enríquez highlights that even though she is more in touch with popular culture, her "socio-political commentary comes more from [her] experience as a citizen than [...] as a journalist" (Enríquez *in* Vitcavage, 2017).

When asked about the political subtext of her writing, Enríquez makes the following comment to David Wallace in an interview with *The New Yorker*:

The sheer terror of the institutional violence and the dictatorships in South America has always verged on something that is beyond just a government's mechanical repression – there was and is, when it surfaces, something more essentially evil about it. [...] I care about politics and I'm interested in history, so it shows up in my work. The fact that I choose a genre that doesn't usually deal with this is important, although I think that contemporary genre fiction approaches these issues more and more often now. But to me it's just a circumstance of my writing. (Wallace, 2016)

Enríquez takes up in her fiction a similar counter-history or counter-narrative as offered by testimony that allows survivors to bear witness to human rights violations and political oppression. In effect, "The Inn" begins with a reference to the father running for office in La Rioja¹⁴ – a province known for having clandestine detention centres and, in some cases, places to torture political prisoners (Carreño, 2018) especially after the coup d'état on the 24 March 1976 (*El independiente*, 2017). Enríquez's brand of horror builds on what Nathan Scott McNamara (2017) has identified as one of the strengths of horror stories: "Horror stories often push some real-world dysfunction to its logical end, and as such they offer rich opportunities for allegory". Yet, in the case of Enríquez, it is not simply allegory but rather an emphasis on drawing from the historical knowledge of Argentina in which the official history created by the military dictatorship (and supported by a conservative bourgeoisie) ignored the true events of human rights violations and even lauded the atrocities carried out by the military.¹⁵

THE HAUNTING OF THE INN

In "The Inn" it is the main protagonist's (Rocío's) father who has the courage to mention the Inn's past as a police academy 30 years prior to being transformed into a hotel (Enríquez, 2017: 41). This acknowledgment of a dark piece of town history is not accepted by his employer and ultimately leads to his dismissal as the town's tour guide. Relating the Inn's past as a police academy links it to the history of clandestine detention and torture centres: "it was a police academy during the dictatorship. You remember the stuff we studied in school?" (*ibidem*: 42). This is a recognition of a past the Inn's owner wishes to ignore because of its negative impact on her business, yet the tourists express

¹⁴ According to local records more than 1500 people from La Rioja were imprisoned during the last dictatorship (Carreño, 2018).

¹⁵ See Castaño Blanco (1988), Calveiro (1998), CONADEP (1984), Duhalde (1999) and Wright (2007).

an interest in wanting to know more about the Inn's past and "about disappearances, torture, whatever" (*ibidem*).

"The Inn" is a ghost story that not only mixes Argentine history (of the *desaparecido*) with the supernatural, as previously mentioned, but does so by also including "social issues" and "fears we have as a society" (Enríquez in NPR Books, 2017). When asked in another interview what was the origin of her "macabre obsessions" Enríquez reveals that:

I've always been a dark girl. As a child I liked ghost stories, the legends from Corrientes that my grandmother used to tell me. I like the genre, I like fear, I like those physical sensations that awaken the macabre, the dark. They have something that gives me an adrenaline rush, that cheers me up. Besides, they are very popular! (Mattio, 2014)¹⁶

Although principally discussed in relation to horror, the style and theme of "The Inn" could also be interpreted alongside the *novela negra*. Much like this genre, this short story succeeds in combining the psychological thriller and the world of socio-political power and corruption to reveal the intricacies of the human psyche. Also following the pattern of the *novela negra*, "The Inn" seeks, in its own way, to denounce the dictatorship (and its inheritances) as well as the resulting culture of impunity in the hope of representing a political and historical reality. In both cases, the reader comes across institutional corruption and a breakdown in social structures.¹⁷

Considering Enríquez's multi-faceted writing style that combines the aforementioned styles of gothic-horror and *novela negra* she also seems to incorporate similar characteristics in her writing that Isabel Pinedo has identified as postmodern elements of the contemporary horror film:

(1) there is a violent disruption of the everyday world; (2) there is a transgression and violation of boundaries; (3) the validity of rationality is thrown into question; (4) there is no narrative closure; and (5) the film produces a bounded experience of fear. (Pinedo, 1996: 20)

¹⁶ In the original: "Siempre fui una chica oscura. De niña me gustaban las historias de fantasmas, las leyendas correntinas que me contaba mi abuela. Me gusta el género, me gusta el miedo, me gustan las sensaciones físicas que despierta lo macabro, lo tenebroso. Tienen algo que me provoca adrenalina, que me levanta el ánimo. Además, ¡son cosas muy populares!".

¹⁷ See Schmidt-Cruz (2010).

Furthermore, Enríquez's refusal of a narrative closure in "The Inn" blurs the lines between the real and spectral space to underline the representation of an unstable, paranoid universe where familiar categories collapse and where the human body is the site of this collapse (Pinedo, 1996: 20). Like the postmodern horror film, Enríquez's short story "The Inn" remembers "ordinary people's ineffectual attempts to resist a violent monster" (*ibidem*: 19) – though the monster in this story are the ghosts of past atrocities committed at the Inn. Enríquez does not have to describe the abuses inflicted on the prisoners brought to the police academy since this knowledge is a shared history in which "horror exposes the terror implicit in everyday life: the pain of loss, the enigma of death, the unpredictability of events, the inadequacy of intentions. [...] By monstrifying quotidian terrors, horror unearths the repressed" (*ibidem*: 26). Enríquez writes not only in the liminal spaces of the public and political but also in the haunted minds and memories of the protagonists as they engage with hostile spectral spaces of violence, torture, and death. The dead do talk – and sometimes as a cacophony of urgency and desperation to be heard.

The protagonists', Florencia's and Rocío's, seemingly ordinary meeting over a two litre Coca-Cola is interrupted by a threatening sense of being under surveillance by a group of mainly women gathered to pray the rosary under the flickering light of candles – casting ghostly shadows on their faces and giving the gathering the feeling of being a funeral. Rocío, as the local, warns Florencia (who is just visiting) that "Back at the kiosk it was no good, they might have been listening to us" (Enríquez, 2017: 43). The ominous "they" disrupts the normal appearance of everyday life with the danger of something hidden that threatens the girls' safety. Paired with the suspicions of being watched by the ghostly figures of the praying women this underlying fear of surveillance and death recalls an Argentine past of kidnappings and disappearances of suspected political subversives. General Iberico Saint Jean, military governor of the province of Buenos Aires stated in May 1976: "First we will kill all the subversives; then we will kill their collaborators, then... their sympathizers, then... those who remain indifferent; and finally we will kill the timid" (*apud* Wright, 2017: 283). Though the two teenage girls secretly meet at the Inn that night to seek revenge for Rocío's father's unjust dismissal from work, one cannot ignore the double meaning the meeting takes on within the Inn's spectral space. This is further emphasized by Florencia's first impression of the cured meats in Rocío's backpack: "it looked like the meat was a dead animal, a piece of human body, something macabre" (Enríquez, 2017: 44). The fact that Florencia automatically assumes it could be a piece of a human body highlights the idea that the sighting of dismembered human bodies happened often enough during that period of history that it is not entirely unexpected. It further highlights the idea of what is horror and unbelievable

for some but is part of a reality lived by others. After all, Florencia refers to the Gypsy's Skirt¹⁸ as "that part of the hill that looked like the stain from a now-dry waterfall of blood" (*ibidem*: 38), another historical reference to the occurrences of mass executions.

The girls' arrival at the Inn connotes an unseen "transgression and violation of boundaries" stipulated by Pinedo (1996: 20) – although Florencia knows that Rocío is seeking to punish Elena for firing her father she is also aware that "the real problem was something else. [...] It was clear she [Rocío] wanted to punish Elena and defend her mother" (Enríquez, 2017: 44). The revenge plot is further complicated by Florencia's enigmatic admission that "someone had told her once that if you wished hard for something you could make it happen, and she wanted Rocío to confide in her, to trust her. If only she would, then they would really be inseparable" (*ibidem*). In the midst of this politically charged revenge plot, this personal reflection seems odd and part of a separate story of which the reader is not entirely cognizant – Florencia's own personal (lesbian love) narrative of which both reader and Rocío are unaware.

Upon entering the Inn Florencia remarks that "[t]he Inn's shape was odd – it really was a lot like a barracks" (*ibidem*: 45) – and with this short observation the reader is transposed back into a medial space that transgresses the real with horror and the supernatural. The girls enter the empty Inn under the cover of night and begin their sabotage plan of hiding various cured meats in cuts made into the mattresses of various rooms with the idea that "the smell of decomposing meat would be unbearable, and with luck, it would take them a long time to find the source of the stench" (*ibidem*). Considering the underlying historical narrative to the short story the hidden "decomposing meat" can be read as representing the dehumanized treatment of the political prisoners as well as the missing bodies of the *desaparecidos* executed, secretly disposed of in the Atlantic Ocean, in the Río de la Plata or in mass graves (like the aforementioned Gypsy's Skirt). Nevertheless, "the stench" of these missing bodies reveals what history cannot hide – though missing bodies these ghosts make their presence felt despite an institutionalized denial of the events.

As a result, the Inn is a space marked by a blurring of boundaries not only between what is real and what is imagined but it is also a space that questions "the validity of rationality" (Pinedo, 1996: 20). The supernatural intercedes into reality and it is up to the reader to make sense of the fear that the girls are experiencing but also that these are the disembodied ghosts of past victims of the Inn's dark past. The girls' experience is one of supernatural horror of the Inn as a site of memorialization of its hidden past as a clandestine detention and torture centre – a function not necessarily known as such by

¹⁸ Gypsy Skirt is a place near town and this particular description infers that it may have been the location of a mass grave or execution site.

those living in the area. It becomes a spectral space haunted by the souls lost and the denial of the population of what was truly happening inside the police academy – like in many other similar sites across the country. Yet, at the same time they are carrying out their revenge plot, the girls seem to be working through an awkward yet undiscovered lesbian sexual awakening: “Florenxia let Rocío press her hand against that warmth and she had a strange feeling, like she had to pee, a tingling just below her belly button” (Enríquez, 2017: 46). The story deftly intertwines a coming-of-age and sexual identification narrative with an esoteric historical narrative of imprisonment, torture and nameless death. In doing so Enríquez is linking past and present acts of violence in which socially perceived deviant and abnormal behaviour is punishable by death and/or torture.

At the moment that the girls are about to lay down beside each other on one of the beds the supernatural interference escalates to the point that the girls cower in fear from the noises that seem unnatural and impossible to be real. Sounds of car engines, scrambling feet and men shouting out paired with pounding of windows and shutters creating an atmosphere of confusion, fear, and imminent life-threatening danger – so frightening that Florenxia loses control of her bladder and wets herself. It is a basic bodily reaction to fear, to witnessing something horrific that cements the history that the girls have learnt in the classroom into their lives through this supernatural experience. That is, it is not the fear of the unknown per se, but rather a confirmation of the terrifying sensations associated with the night kidnappings of political prisoners and the tortures associated with their detention. Said abductions typically occurred at night with the victim taken from their home in their pyjamas with a pillowcase over their heads while their family members were beaten by other officers. The victim was then taken to a waiting car (usually a Ford Falcon,¹⁹ amongst others) and either pushed down on the floor of the back seat or into the trunk. Furthermore, the reference to the mattresses also alludes to the documented use of mattresses as part of the torture inflicted on prisoners: many could have been tied spread eagle to these mattresses and suffered a type of torture called *picana*, during which high voltage shocks of electricity were delivered through a bronze spoon to all parts of the body. In some cases *picanas* was forced up women’s vaginas, even those who were pregnant; while for men they were often applied to their testicles.²⁰ As such the girls’ climbing onto the mattress seems to trigger the spectral event where the girls’ limited historical knowledge is affirmed via supernatural intervention.

¹⁹ The Ford Falcon became the vehicle associated with the military and part of the psychological warfare exercised by those in power.

²⁰ See Crowe Morey and Spahr (2016).

The ghostly experience the girls have at the Inn brings together two crucial points outlined by Pinedo with respect to the post-modern horror film: there is a break in rationality that also prevents a narrative closure. Combined with the acknowledgement of the historical past of the Inn as a clandestine detention/torture centre the girls' personal psychological break reflects a destabilized emotional state that makes them question what they had really witnessed and experienced. When interviewed by *La Voz* Enríquez admitted that: "The best way I found to describe madness in a horror story is in that borderline zone between the external threat and the distorted interpretation of reality, which must be absolutely maddening" (*in* Orosz, 2009).²¹ The level of fear is such that even Florencia's mother finds it difficult to be angry with her daughter seeing the level of traumatization that the young girl is demonstrating. In essence, the mother is more concerned that something really did happen to the girls rather than what the girls were doing at the Inn without permission. In a way, the level of extreme fear and trauma the girls exhibit ultimately provokes fear in those around them. Unfortunately, it is a terror that follows the girls back home – a haunting of the fear that the ghosts will return and of ghostly shadows moving in the hallways of their own homes.

CONCLUSION

It becomes evident that the dark abandoned space of the Inn takes on its own role as a character in the story and reflects the tortured process of memorialization of a period of Argentine history. A time haunted by horrific acts committed onto bodies of people during an era of military and police surveillance, not only by those in political power but also the fear of policing done by neighbours and friends. The Inn becomes a site of convergence of a spectral past, a dark history written onto the walls of the building not only as an ex-police academy/clandestine detention centre but also as a mark of a historical reality that cannot be removed or denied no matter how much one hopes to discount it as a mere ghost story made up to destroy the Inn as a business. It is a reminder that no matter how much one desires to erase or deny the past, the "stench" of the rotting "meat" will denounce the atrocities committed and re-member the disembodied *desaparecidos* into both personal and national discourses. Yet, it goes beyond the psychological haunting of those who witness the ghosts in the shadows of history of the Inn – it is a spectral existence that forever marks not only the site but also the psyche of the Argentine nation. In the end, Enríquez admits that "I don't think you can take the power back, not

²¹ In the original: "La mejor manera que encontré de contar la locura en un relato de terror es en esa zona fronteriza entre la amenaza externa y la interpretación distorsionada de la realidad, que debe ser absolutamente desesperante".

completely, but you can break the silence. I don't know if that's empowering." (*in* Rice, 2018).

In effect, "The Inn" is a fictional exploration of both the horror and the traumatic legacy of Argentina's last dictatorship in which the reader can see a bifurcation of the *testimonio* from the traditional denouncing of the physical acts of injustice to a geographical *testimonio* that documents the clandestine locations where the atrocities were committed. Enríquez builds onto this *testimonio* her style of horror fiction that includes an historical knowledge and acknowledgment of the identification of previous clandestine concentration, torture and internment sites of Argentina's political prisoners and *desaparecidos*.

Ultimately, there are characters in Enríquez's short stories whose bodies and minds acquire something that is so far distanced from the human that it becomes more bestial (Angulo and Stemberger, 2017: 317) – a reflection in itself of the dehumanization of the *desaparecidos* that still haunts Argentina's past and present. It is a fictional horror that recognizes the real horror of the psychological and physical trauma of a troubling period of Argentine history. Enríquez's fiction does what testimonial literature has done in the past: it unites the political and the social with the literary as a method of not forgetting the atrocities of the past so that they may not be repeated in the present nor in the future. Sadly, under the leadership of Mauricio Macri (2015-2019) there has been a noticeable decline in projects related to human rights and social justice – causing many to fear not only an erasure of Argentina's past infractions but also pointing out the fragility and erasability of historical memory once again.

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