



FILHOS DE IMPÉRIO E PÓS-MEMÓRIAS EUROPEIAS  
CHILDREN OF EMPIRES AND EUROPEAN POSTMEMORIES  
ENFANTS D'EMPIRES ET POSTMÉMOIRES EUROPÉENNES

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## ARGENTINA AND ITS FAMILIAL SCARS

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The theme of *Memoirs* is the familial and intergenerational transmission of traumatic memory, which itself is one way of defining the concept of 'post-memory.' The family is an opaque and indecipherable object that fundamentally complicates the task of studying private memories. How can we pierce the thick diaphragm that protects and obscures the subjective, private and disavowed pasts buried in the darkest and deepest regions of the family space? Paradise; purgatory; hell: families – and their unconfessed or unconfessable pasts – are an enigma for any outside interpreter.

*The Resistance*, by Julián Fuks, a young writer, was published in Brazil in 2015 and in Portugal in 2017 and has already received several prestigious prizes (Jabuti 2016, Saramago 2017). The book presents a deep and cutting anatomy of a family fragmented by violence, and in a certain way offers a literary



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example of the theoretical problem of memory transmission. Fuks is Brazilian, the son of Argentinean psychoanalysts who sought political exile in Brazil in the aftermath of the bloody repression executed by the military dictatorship in Argentina in the 1970s. Exploiting the possibilities of autofiction as a form of writing, Fuks constructs a narrative that dissects and interrogates a family past marked by silence, prohibition, mystery and entangled affection. Above all, Fuks constructs the narrative through the trope of a disjunctive family member, an adoptive brother who represents the fundamental clue to unravelling the family's tortuous and impenetrable story.

Two icons emerge in the narrative: inheritance (not least in its negative sense, the inheritance of exile) and scarring, marks of an exposed past that delineate the border between the body and the world. The most startling scar, itself a silent signal, is precisely the adoptive brother himself, to whom the narrator never refers by name (yet to whom Fuks dedicates the book), but who, in his fugitive and disarming muteness, is constantly at the centre of each scene, even as he is on the margins, inhabiting a troubling non-belonging.

Fuks intends to engage with the problematic limitations of this story of a family life shattered by Latin American history. A militant couple adopt a son and later are coerced into exile in Brazil, where they have two biological children. History is refracted through familial memory and becomes inapprehensible, as if the memory has overshadowed it and prevented it from seeing its own shape.

The writing extends its scope to look for meaning in the act of 'resistance': a word which, in the epigraph, Ernesto Sabato wonders how to confront. The narrator notes that (chapter 13), "having a child will always be an act of resistance." In the same way, it is an act of resistance to write, to challenge the semantic limit of expressions and words. The book is like a child. It is for this reason that Fuks' writing is so controlled and rigorous, leaning toward an almost poetic density, turned towards the creases of a language without pretensions to representation, exhausting itself within its form of expression.

There is, however, a thick context to this familial *memoir*: the history of military Argentina, the parents' experience of their doctor friend's disappearance, the devastating fear that comes with being in opposition, always at risk of denunciation and fearing for your life. The family is saved after moving to the other country, but living within the domestic walls is the unique presence of the other; the other son; the other brother. He is the exile within exile, exiled from Argentina, exiled from the family.



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From within this silence his lament bubbles up and bursts out: “You all talk so much but see nothing” (chapter 42). The brother’s book thus becomes the means for an impossible quest through the very heart of his adoptive family’s pain. The narrator, in order to understand what escapes him of the adoptive “possible brother,” returns to Buenos Aires to search for the inaccessible family past. Here he rediscovers remnants of the traumatic history that befell Argentina. In particular, he approaches the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo who, as a form of fragile reparation for the deaths and destruction of the bodies of their children, are looking for the grandchildren adopted by military families. If the brother had been the child of *desaparecidos* – even though, in any event, his parents would have been on the side of the persecuted – the narration could have acquired a heroic tenor. But a fake one.

In the penultimate chapter, the parents read the book their son has written, whose past remains impenetrable in spite of everything. They do not see themselves in the plot.

Writing, any writing about the past, will always be marked by deviations and incongruities. Yet even given the insurmountable limits of representation, the past finds its way to inscription and memory can flow from one generation to another. The past will always be forbidden, but signs, indications, and survivals can refound family memory, albeit lost and repressed. Through writing, private space is made political and public, made into a place where other people can recognise themselves, where children and parents can find each other again. Versions of the past, however, are always multiple and always other: “This account of mine was composed for a long time by my parents, and I can only wriggle a little way from their version of the facts. When I look at them, I feel that I am partly a being that they have shaped to narrate them, that my memory is made of their memory, and my history will always have to contain their history” (Chapter 35). This familial fold of memory is post-memory.

Translation by **Alexandra Reza**

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