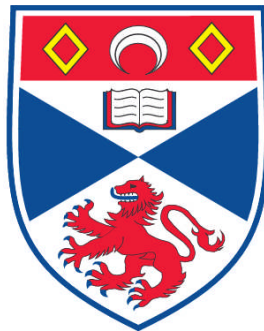


**SITES OF STRUGGLE:  
REPRESENTATIONS OF FAMILY IN SPANISH FILM  
(1996-2004)**

**Jennifer Rutherford**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St. Andrews**



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**SITES OF STRUGGLE:  
REPRESENTATIONS OF FAMILY IN SPANISH FILM (1996-2004)**

**Jennifer Rutherford neé Holmes**

Thesis submitted to the University of St Andrews for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

30<sup>th</sup> September 2009



## ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses how ways of thinking about and meanings of family are (re)negotiated and (re)presented in six films that, to varying degrees, are categorised as *cine social*. The group of films consists of *Familia* (León de Aranoa, 1996), *Solas* (Zambrano, 1999), *Flores de otro mundo* (Bollaín, 1999), *Poniente* (Gutiérrez, 2002), *Te doy mis ojos* (Bollaín, 2003) and *Cachorro* (Albaladejo, 2004). Despite the growing body of critical work on the wide-ranging social themes they deal with, little sustained attention has been given to their representations of family. Scholars tend to mention it only in passing, or refer back to the allegorical/mediating function that family has often played in Spanish cinema. The objective of this thesis is to place the emphasis, as the films do themselves, on the family *per se*. Insights into family from a range of academic fields including philosophy, sociology, feminist and queer theories and cultural, race and gender studies are combined with close textual readings and a consideration of the modes of representation and address employed in the films to analyse how they function as sites of ideological struggle. The thesis begins by sketching out historically and culturally situated definitions of family and providing an overview of some of its most iconic representations in Spanish cinema. Establishing many of the aspects developed in the main body of the thesis the first chapter concentrates on *Familia*, which denaturalises the hegemonic family by presenting it as a self-conscious performance. The subsequent four chapters focus on family forms, roles, practices, commitment, power dynamics and domestic space. They explore how the films' affective and informed modes of address position the spectator in relation to criticisms of the traditional family and evaluations of emerging family ideologies, finally proposing that they could usefully be viewed as a cycle of postmodern family melodramas.



## DECLARATIONS

I, Jennifer Rutherford néé Holmes, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 83,015 words in length, has been written by me, that it is a record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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I was admitted as a research student in September 2003 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in September 2003; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2003 and 2009.

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This thesis is dedicated to Val and Debbie Holmes,  
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## INTRODUCTION

### 0.1 Outlines

#### 0.1.1 Why Study Filmic Representations of Family?

It is something of a cliché to say that family is important in Spain and to Spaniards.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it is a truism that continues to be confirmed by opinion polls and that finds cultural affirmation in the plethora of films throughout Spanish cinema history that have focused on families and relationships between family members.<sup>2</sup> These representations of family have ranged from Fructuós Gelabert I Badiella's *Visita de doña María Cristina y don Alfonso XIII a Barcelona* (1898), one of the first reels ever filmed in Spain that captures the nation's most iconic family, to Pedro Almodóvar's multi-award winning *Volver* (2006), a dramatic black comedy about a family of women. The continuities and vast differences between these two examples point to how meanings of family and their cultural articulation not only reproduce norms, but are also transformed over time. Indeed, it is the shifting ideological underpinnings and textual attributes of these representations, rather than their volume, that have come to make the family such a fascinating figure in Spanish film.

Conventionally, progressive politics has shunned the family as “one of the primary loci of moral conservatism and social immobilism”, on the basis that it is a site where gender inequalities, hetero-normative sexualities and class, racial and generational hierarchies have traditionally been reproduced.<sup>3</sup> This notion is particularly pronounced in Spain, where the ideological and legal protection of the patriarchal structures and values of the traditional family were central to Francoism

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<sup>1</sup> See Hooper (2006: 134-135).

<sup>2</sup> See Magone (2009: 39).

<sup>3</sup> O'Shaughnessy (2007: 148).

that presented it “como célula primaria natural y fundamento de la sociedad, y al mismo tiempo como institución moral dotada de derecho inalienable y superior”.<sup>4</sup> During Francisco Franco’s dictatorship (1939-1975), which coincided with cinema’s heyday in Spain, filmmakers colluded with or subverted the regime’s politicisation of the family, thereby establishing its representation as a key site of ideological struggle. Introduced by Marsha Kinder, the subsequent readings of dysfunctional and/or repressive filmic families as critical metaphors for the power structures of the state or the general political health of the nation became a rich vein in Spanish cinema scholarship.<sup>5</sup> Although this family-as-microcosm or vehicle approach continues to be relevant, it has not been accompanied by detailed investigations of the family *per se*. Neither has enough allowance been made for the changes that have taken place, both in ideologies of family and in the conditions of filmmaking. As such, it could be argued that, eclipsed by its metaphorical or mediating function, family has been simultaneously present yet absent in much of the critical literature on films made during the dictatorship and the transition period.

If the importance of family is already a well-established cliché, another claim that gained purchase around the turn of the twenty-first century is that “traditional family structures have collapsed with astonishing speed”.<sup>6</sup> The language used in this comment made by Paul Julian Smith in his review of Benito Zambrano’s *Solas* (1999), although almost certainly not used with this intention, echoes and affirms the sentiments conveyed by alarmist conservative discourse of the family in crisis and

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<sup>4</sup> *Leyes fundamentales: Fuero de los españoles de 1945* [accessed 2.6.08].

<sup>5</sup> See Kinder (1983) and (1989). This subsequent scholarship has included Hopewell (1986: 92-104) and Kinder (1993: 197-275), while Evans (1999) and Gámez Fuentes (2004) have developed the approach by focusing on the figure of the mother.

<sup>6</sup> Smith (2001: 56).



under siege.<sup>7</sup> This is a discourse that grew in strength and volume between 1996 and 2004, during the two mandates of José María Aznar's Partido Popular (PP), which promoted the hegemonic status of the traditional family model. However, at the same time, and arguably at least partly reacting against the PP's stance, this hegemonic status was increasingly being challenged by support for alternative models inscribed in political and cultural texts and actions, associated with those on the left. This created a heightened tension surrounding family forms and functions during this period and beyond as these alternatives have been (re)presented not as examples of the traditional family in crisis, but rather as desirable choices that are equally worthy hegemonic status. During these years some filmmakers in Spain created texts that constitute particularly compelling ideological criticisms of the traditional family and increasingly coherent affirmations of the alternatives. In this context it is time to take a new look at how family is represented in Spanish cinema.

This thesis focuses on *Familia* (Fernando León de Aranoa, 1996), *Solas* (Benito Zambrano, 1999), *Flores de otro mundo* (Iciar Bollain, 1999), *Poniente* (Chus Gutiérrez, 2002), *Te doy mis ojos* (Iciar Bollain, 2003) and *Cachorro* (Miguel Albaladejo, 2004), six films released during this eight-year period that take the question of what The Family should and should not be as their central theme. They are also films that, to varying degrees, could all be said to belong to the critical category of *cine social*. I consider how they articulate a range of aspects of family, including forms, roles and responsibilities, marriage and/or commitment, power dynamics and domestic space. Working with Stuart Hall's notion of cinema as one of

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<sup>7</sup> For a striking example of this discourse see the "Todo sobre la familia y la vida" section of [sosfamilia.es](http://sosfamilia.es) [accessed 20.11.08].

the systems through which we (re)present our world to ourselves and to one another,<sup>8</sup> these films and *cine social* are examined as ideological sites of struggle where emerging meanings and ways of thinking about The Family in Spain were (re)imagined and (re)negotiated between 1996 and 2004.

### **0.1.2 Research Questions and Methodology**

In my examination of the group of films defined above, I will address three central questions:

1. How is family represented in this group of films?
2. Which genres, modes or sensibilities are employed in the selected films?
3. How do these modes or sensibilities work to position the spectator in relation to ideologies of the family?

The analysis carried out in response to these three questions will, in turn, enable me to tackle a fourth and final question:

4. What can detailed analysis of these films contribute to wider discussions about modes of representation and popular traditions within Spanish cinema?

The shifting sociological, historical, juridical and cultural contexts of the films will be foregrounded throughout this thesis, in recognition of the situated but constantly developing character of family ideologies. In order to address the first of the questions listed above, discussions of these contexts will be complemented by a strong emphasis on close readings of the film texts. Particular attention will be paid to elements such as narrative structures and patterns, characterisation, music, editing and

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<sup>8</sup> Hall (1985: 103).

visual style as well as aspects of the *mise-en-scène* including lighting, diegetic sound, framing, locations, sets, props, costumes, and the actors' performance and movement.

To tackle the second question these close readings will be examined alongside considerations of how the films have been marketed, how their directors present themselves, how critics and scholars have discussed the films in relation to genre and, where possible, how audiences have responded to the films both in Spain and abroad. The marketing material studied includes aspects such as the films' titles, publicity material (theatrical posters and dvd covers), trailers, press releases and details on production or distribution company websites, which all contain genre labels and cues that mould and/or influence the spectators' horizons of expectation. On the matter of how directors present themselves in relation to their films I draw on the interviews they have given and commentaries they have made reported in the press, online, or included as part of the dvd extras/film scripts, where available. Aspects of audience reception are tentatively gauged by means of analysing the language used by individuals from around the world who have written comments and message board posts about the films on the IMDb. Although such small samples can only afford a preliminary notion of how the films may have been received it is nevertheless possible to discern within them interesting patterns concerning how the films are described and how they have been understood.

Once identified the films' generic elements, modes or sensibilities will be examined in relation to Julia Hallam and Margaret Marshment's refinement of Murray Smith's work on imaginative engagement in order to try to answer the third question. Drawing on cognitive approaches to film Smith has defined three levels of engagement with characters (recognition, alignment and allegiance) that combine to

create what he calls “structures of sympathy”.<sup>9</sup> Hallam and Marshment have developed Smith’s approach by expanding this notion of imaginative engagement to include all possible textual stimuli, ranging from facial gestures to music or the positioning of the camera.<sup>10</sup> Smith, Hallam and Marshment’s approaches will be covered in greater depth, together with a discussion of the concepts of genres, modes and sensibilities, in the critical framework section of this introduction. A section that will also discusses the concept of genre and the more fluid notion of cinematic modes, terms that are central to the fourth question, after they have first been introduced and placed in the context of Spanish cinema history in section 0.3.

### **0.1.3 Coming to Terms: Family/Ideology/Representation**

Scholarly books and articles that analyse representations of family usually acknowledge that family is a problematic and ideologically complex concept in the Spanish context.<sup>11</sup> However, this tends to be accompanied by an all too skeletal explanation of what the author means by ‘family’, ‘the patriarchal family’ or ‘ideal family’, that also ultimately relies too heavily on the assumption of a shared and static understanding. Consequently, because films and families, or more accurately a consideration of dominant ideologies and representations of the family form the backbone of this thesis, it is necessary to start by being much more explicit about what I mean when using this term.

Described by Amy S. Wharton as “the most taken-for-granted of all social institutions”, the family hardly seems to require an explanation.<sup>12</sup> It is taken for

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<sup>9</sup> Smith, (2004: 81-86).

<sup>10</sup> Hallam and Marshment (2000: 134-141).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Kinder (1993: 41-52), Ballesteros (2001: 271-296) and Huerta Floriano (2005: 56-70).

<sup>12</sup> Wharton (2005: 101).

granted not only that we as individuals naturally know what it is and what it means, but also that this knowledge is stable and shared. However, Antonio Gramsci reminds us that the terrain of the taken-for-granted, common sense, is “a product of history and a part of the historical process”; it is “not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life”.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, one only needs to consider how attitudes towards and assumptions about family have changed over the last fifty years, or vary from culture to culture, to start to appreciate that family is better understood as a culturally and historically specific model or schema. The complexities of its institutional and lived forms are reflected in the wide variety of academic fields, including philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, feminist and queer theories, and cultural, race, gender, gay and lesbian studies, where work on who and what, or who should and what should, constitute family is taking place. By drawing on this diverse but constantly overlapping body of work my framing of the family throughout this thesis is necessarily interdisciplinary. Particular attention is paid to scholars such as Jeffrey Weeks, Judith Stacey, Diana Gittins, Iris Marion Young and bell hooks, whose groundbreaking work at the intersections of sexuality, gender, race and family has proved particularly thought-provoking.

Marxist social scientists were the first to challenge the notion that family was a natural or inevitable social unit, arguing instead that it was “a material and ideological prop of capitalism”.<sup>14</sup> This criticism was built upon by many second-wave feminists, who argued that as a patriarchal institution, site of uneven gender relations and major

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<sup>13</sup> Gramsci (2007: 325-326).

<sup>14</sup> See Weeks (1991: 222) and Engels (1943).

source of “women’s oppression” the family had to be rejected.<sup>15</sup> In turn, a number of black feminists disputed this (white, middle-class) evaluation of family as ethnocentric in its failure to incorporate questions of race. While acknowledging that the family has functioned to oppress women they stressed that it has also been a vital site of empowerment, and of political and cultural resistance to racism.<sup>16</sup> Most recently, however, it has arguably been scholars and activists allied with the gay rights movement, queer theories and politics who have rigorously questioned the heteronormativity of the family and influenced many of the nascent changes and ideological shifts in relation to how family is understood.<sup>17</sup>

Over the last century, in the social and cultural imaginaries of most countries in the West, the family has predominantly been embodied by the ideal of the heterosexual, middle-class, white, monogamous, married couple and their biological children living together under one patriarchal roof. Protected by the law, promoted by social policy and (re)presented in religious, educational and cultural discourses, this model has privileged and been privileged by the hegemonic power of the white, bourgeois, heterosexual male. Because this ideal is constantly conflated with the material realities of families, it is useful or indeed imperative, to be able to differentiate between these two distinct yet inextricably intertwined elements. Many of the scholars whose work has challenged simple essentialised notions of family have, therefore, tended to indicate this elision by disrupting or modifying the sign. That is to say that as a means of alerting their readers to the complexities that the

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<sup>15</sup> Barrett (1980: 214). See also de Beauvoir (1953) on “domestic labour”, Friedan (1963) on the “trapped housewife” and “the problem with no name”, Greer (1971) on the “tyranny” of housework, and Oakley (1974) on the sociology of housework.

<sup>16</sup> See Carby (1982) and hooks (1990).

<sup>17</sup> See Weston (1991), Weeks (1991), (1995) and (2007), Stacey (1996) and (1998), Lehr (1999) and Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001).

family [sign] obscures, they place it within inverted commas [‘the family’], add emphasis with italics [*the* family], or use capital letters and the definite article [The Family]: it is the latter modification that is used in this thesis.<sup>18</sup> Such disruptions of the sign invite a more critical reading, and also tend to signal that what is being evoked or is under discussion is not material or lived family life but the dominant or hegemonic ideology of The Family, a momentarily stabilised/naturalised historically and culturally contingent model against which families are compared. Yet, despite its associations with the repressive ruling classes or patriarchal ideology, Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh maintain that, the continued popularity of family means that a theory of ideology is needed “that casts people as participants rather than passive consumers”.<sup>19</sup>

Growing out of Marxism both ideology and hegemony were originally understood in imaginative relation to the ruling (bourgeois, capitalist) class. However, cultural theorists’ rereadings of Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci have come to dismantle this monolithic vision of ideology, and used it to discuss multiple social and cultural constructions, including gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, nationality and age.<sup>20</sup> Drawing on the work of Hall, ideologies can be understood, not in the reductive Marxist sense, nor as distortions or false consciousness, but as “systems of representation – composed of concepts, ideas, myths, or images – in which men and women live their imaginary relations to the real conditions of existence”.<sup>21</sup> Common sense, so often (re)presented as a (Universal) Truth, is therefore perhaps better

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<sup>18</sup> See Weeks (1991), Barrett and McIntosh (1991), Gittins (1993) and Young (1996).

<sup>19</sup> Barrett and McIntosh (1991: 21).

<sup>20</sup> This tendency grew out of rereadings undertaken by leading cultural theorist Stuart Hall and his contemporaries in the 1970s and 1980s. See Hall (1977), (1985) and (1986) and Hall, Lumley and McLennan (1978).

<sup>21</sup> Hall (1985: 103). Hall, in turn, was inspired by Althusser (1969) and (1971).

understood as power/knowledge in a state of continual and uneven production and transformation, momentarily stabilised in a way that privileges and maintains the power of specific social groups [hegemony].<sup>22</sup> This may be built on by looking to schema theory, which is outlined in more detail below. Schema theory sees ideologies as models of mental activity that are learned and perpetuated within specific cultural environments in such a way that individuals tend to participate in rather than think about them because they are so familiar and automatised. Smith notes that

conceiving of ideology as a network of automatized beliefs allows for both the constraining power of ideology, and the possibility of moving within and even beyond these constraints (which does not, of course, entail that in doing so we can exist outside of any and all constraints).<sup>23</sup>

It could be said that the hegemonic ideology or dominant model of The Family is (re)produced, as Martha Fineman argues, “through the operations of formal institutions and structures of power” and “transmitted through everyday discourse – through language, symbols and images”, that is, through representation.<sup>24</sup>

Since the early twentieth century, the narrative development and resolution of much of the mainstream national cinematic product, and many of the Hollywood films widely distributed in Spain, have worked to (re)present and (re)produce dominant ideas about family forms, functions and values.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, Christine Gledhill comments that much of the ideological impact of media forms stems from their

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<sup>22</sup> See Gramsci (2007: 323-377) and Foucault (1980: 109-133).

<sup>23</sup> Smith (2004: 50).

<sup>24</sup> Fineman (1995: 22).

<sup>25</sup> Introduced in 1930 to ensure moral standards in film including upholding the sanctity of marriage and home, the Hollywood Production Code, or the Hays Code as it was better known, meant that at least in the early years of the dictatorship imported American films were often ideologically in tune with Francoism, though cuts and careful dubbing were used if deemed necessary by the censors. See Black (1994) on moral guardianship (censorship) in Hollywood, and Ávila (1997) and Caparrós Lera (1983) on censorship in Spain.



attempts “to name and win support for certain kinds of cultural value and identity over others”.<sup>26</sup> The notion of film as one of the sites of ideological struggle where forms and functions of family are rendered visible, sayable, imaginable, where meanings are (re)negotiated, and hegemony can potentially be won, is at the heart of the close textual readings undertaken in the main body of this thesis. Departing from these considerations it also sets out to examine how the films may be working to challenge dominant ideologies of Family rather than simply reproducing them.

## 0.2 Socio-Historic Contexts: The Family in Spain

### 0.2.1 Introduction

Starting from the notion that The Family needs to be understood as a historically and culturally contingent form of association, this section places the more abstract discussion started above within the specific socio-historic context of Spain in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I sketch out historically and culturally situated definitions of what I am going to term The Traditional Family, The Neoconservative Family and The Postmodern Family. In order to do this, I analyse sites where ideologies of The Family have been inscribed in language and behaviour between 1996 and 2004, including State legislation, pressure/policy group webpages, statistical reports, sociological studies and the PP and the Partido Socialista Obrero Español’s (PSOE) key family policy plans. The latter take the form of the PP’s *Plan integral de apoyo a la familia 2001-2004* (PIAF) published in 2001, and the PSOE’s *Políticas para el bienestar de las familias* (PBF) published in 2002.<sup>27</sup> In using these

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<sup>26</sup> Gledhill (1997: 348).

<sup>27</sup> See MTAS (2002) for the full PIAF text. Announced in 1997 but not approved and published until 2001 the PIAF was the first major attempt to consolidate family policy at a national level since the end of the dictatorship. It echoed the PSOE’s intention, expressed in their 1996 election manifesto, to

party-specific documents, I am not suggesting that family ideologies should, or can, be reduced to party politics. Neither am I suggesting that the dominant family ideal during a specific historic period will neatly correspond to the institutional family, that is, the composition and function of family sanctioned and protected by the State and by extension the governing political force. Nevertheless, it seems significant that these two prominent ideologies struggling for hegemony should be so deeply inscribed in party political documents, with the PP and PSOE respectively registering their support for The Neoconservative Family and The Postmodern Family. This situation may be explained, at least in part, by the historical politicization of family in Spain discussed below.

### **0.2.2 In Transition: The Family Pre-1996**

During the Franco years (1939-1975) a range of pro-marriage, pronatalist, familialist policies, legal disincentives, financial compensation and prizes were put in place to support and promote The Francoist Family, or The Traditional Family; a hierarchical, patriarchal institution characterised by rigid gendered roles that represented “the corporate order of the state in microcosm”.<sup>28</sup> The father (*pater familias*) embodied the assertive patriarchal authority of the *jefe de Estado* (Franco) within the home, where women were expected to fulfil submissively their biological and social destiny as mothers and carers.<sup>29</sup> *Patria potestad* legally gave the *pater*

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create a *Plan de acción integral para la familia*, see PSOE (2002) [accessed 18.8.08] for the full PBF text.

<sup>28</sup> Graham (1995b: 184). See also Nash (1991: 170-173) and Meil Landwerlin (2006: 361-367).

<sup>29</sup> This promotion of the traditional “domestic ideology of ‘separate spheres’” was supported and propagated by the Catholic Church and by the Sección Femenina, which “conscripted women into ‘domestic tours of duty’, and taught the gospel of domesticity” (Radcliff, 2001: 95). Several scholars, including Grothe (1999: 513-538) and Morcillo (2000: 36-42), remind us that rather than being original, Francoist rhetoric drew on, amongst other sources, centuries of Catholic doctrine, Juan Luis Vives *La instrucción de la mujer cristiana* (1523), Fray Luis de León’s 16<sup>th</sup> century treatise *La perfecta casada*, and the 19<sup>th</sup> century ideal of the *ángel del hogar*.

*familias* complete power over his children and his wife, who was considered a minor before the law. It went without saying that the sacred and indissoluble institution of marriage would unite the couple at the heart of this (white, heterosexual) nuclear family. “Unthreatening because it connected vertically with the state rather than horizontally within society”, this prescribed ideal of The Traditional Family together with the Catholic faith and devotion to the *Patria* formed the three ideological pillars of Francoist society.<sup>30</sup> However, after Franco’s death in 1975, Spain’s landmark Constitution, passed in December 1978, clearly stated that public powers would ensure “la protección social, económica y jurídica de la familia”,<sup>31</sup> however it did not try to define family. As Inés Alberdi points out, this allowed, in legal terms, for “su futura evolución o diversificación”.<sup>32</sup>

In comparison with the Franco years, little focus was placed on family during the PSOE’s time in government (1982-1996).<sup>33</sup> They came to power in the wake of reforms that had largely brought legislation into line with the family related decisions that many Spaniards were already taking.<sup>34</sup> Nuclear-family-centric sociological and demographic studies from the nineties have noted that Spain experienced a gradual

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<sup>30</sup> Graham (1995b: 184).

<sup>31</sup> *Constitución Española* (1978), Article 39.

<sup>32</sup> Alberdi et al. (1995: 3-4).

<sup>33</sup> See Madruga Torremocha (2006: 220) and Valiente (1996: 108). The PSOE’s social policy was less familialist and more universal/individualistic in character marking them out as ideologically out of step with socialist parties elsewhere in Europe, who after the Second World War “acceptaron las prestaciones familiares subrayando su objetivo igualitario y dejando de lado los objetivos natalistas [y familialistas]” (Valiente, 1996: 219).

<sup>34</sup> These reforms, which included divorce by mutual consent, the end to women’s traditionally legally subordinate position within marriage, the extension of the right to exercise *patria potestad* over children to mothers and the equalisation of children’s rights regardless of the marital state of their parents, were introduced in 1981. See Cousins (2005a: 61) and Threlfall (2005: 30-48). Abortion was legalised in certain circumstances in 1985 after the PSOE came to power. See Brooksbank Jones (1997: 85-87) and Sundman (1994).

diversification of family forms from the late sixties onwards.<sup>35</sup> Since then, official statistics have registered slow increases in single parent and reconstituted (step) families, and more recently have observed similar increases in married and co-habiting, and different or same-sex couples with or without children. Migrant and multiethnic families start to receive cursory mentions in studies and statistics around the mid-nineties. However, the empirical data also shows that the heterosexual, conjugal, nuclear family remains the dominant family form in Spain.<sup>36</sup>

The PSOE hailed “la aparición de una familia más democrática y de unas parejas más igualitarias, presididas por la idea de la igualdad entre el hombre y la mujer” as early as 1988.<sup>37</sup> This sentiment was echoed in a PSOE-commissioned nationwide state-of-the-family report published in 1995 that described the “familia moderna” in Spain as based around “la cooperación colectiva capaz de lograr el mayor éxito posible de *todos y cada uno* de los miembros de la familia”.<sup>38</sup> However, the progressive notion of an egalitarian family (re)presented in these documents is contradicted by empirical data that reveals a continued substantial disparity between men and women, for example, in relation to the division of domestic labour.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Alberto Mira stresses that social change during these years was often “more shallow than it looked”.<sup>40</sup> According to Mira, libertarianism tended to mean that a topic was freely discussed or represented “rather than something progressive [having] to be

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<sup>35</sup> See Requena (1993), Alberdi et al. (1995: 56-189), Jurado Guerrero and Naldini (1996: 44), Reher (1997: 246-270) and Alberdi (1999).

<sup>36</sup> Jurado Guerrero and Naldini (1996: 44).

<sup>37</sup> Madruga Torremocha (2006: 224-225), quoting the PSOE’s *El Programa 2000*, published in 1988.

<sup>38</sup> Alberdi et al. (1995: 463).

<sup>39</sup> Opinion polls have repeatedly shown an increase in the number of men in Spain agreeing that household chores should be shared between the sexes, see Valiente (2005b: 191-193) and Brooksbank Jones (1997: 92-94). But statistics gathered by the Instituto de la Mujer since 1993 reveal that this sentiment continues not to be translated into a fairer division of time spent on domestic labour, see IM: Estadísticas (1993) and (2001) [accessed 17.11.08], and EFE (2003b) [accessed 21.2.05].

<sup>40</sup> Mira (2000: 245).

done about it”.<sup>41</sup> Arguably, and ironically, this situation was perpetuated in part by the PSOE’s desire to distance themselves from questions relating to family in general, due to its previous associations with Francoism. Consequently, not only did The Francoist Family remain a powerful figure in the cultural and social imagination of the newly democratic Spain, but lived realities remained far closer to this spectre than the ideology of The Progressive or Democratic Family inscribed in public opinion would seem to suggest.

### **0.2.3 In Power: The Neoconservative Family**

After almost two decades of relative invisibility, Juan Antonio Fernández Cordon observes that from the mid-nineties onwards issues relating to family began to show a “marked presence on the political agenda as well as in the media”.<sup>42</sup> It was in this environment that José María Aznar’s conservative Partido Popular, the party that had grown up out of remnants of Francoism, won the elections in 1996. Keen to “present itself to the electorate as a new and truly democratic party, and not the heir of Francoism”,<sup>43</sup> the PP’s approach to policies relating to family and gender relations has been described by Stephen Mangen as “a tactical mixture of modernization and conservatism”.<sup>44</sup> This is the attitude that is manifested in The Neoconservative Family.

One of the key characteristics of The Neoconservative Family evident in the PP’s *Plan integral de apoyo a la familia 2001-2004* (PIAF) is the unwillingness or (perhaps worse) failure to see the need to question what is meant by family. Using quantitative statements only to justify supporting family the PIAF conveniently avoids

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>42</sup> Fernández Cordon (2001) [accessed 11.7.08].

<sup>43</sup> Valiente (1996: 109).

<sup>44</sup> Mangen (2001: 208).

any discussion of the definitions on which such statistics are based;<sup>45</sup> definitions that remain similarly unreflective if one looks at literature published by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE).<sup>46</sup> A particularly striking example of this characteristic of The Neoconservative Family is visible on the front page of a *Cifras INE* pamphlet entitled “Cuántos somos en casa” that details some of the results from the 2001 *Censo de población* [Figure 1]. Text stating “el aumento de hogares unipersonales”, the “disminución de las parejas con 4 hijos o más” and “el aumento del número de parejas sin hijos” is incongruously dominated by a tightly framed, colourful photograph of a male and female adult with a young boy and baby girl.<sup>47</sup> The reader is left in no doubt that although this image is not representative of the results reported alongside it, the (stereotypical) white, middle-class, conjugal (monogamous), heterosexual family that it represents is The Neoconservative Family that *should* be “en casa”.

Just as the relationship, or lack thereof, between the text and photograph in this pamphlet is ideologically revealing, so too is the structure of the PP’s PIAF. For example, a paragraph stating that “familias numerosas *deben recibir* apoyo” because they demographically and economically enrich Spain, is directly followed by a paragraph stating that “familias monoparentales [...] *requieren* de un apoyo adicional”, implying that by comparison the latter must be a drain on society.<sup>48</sup> Implicitly explicit here is the pronatalism of The Neoconservative Family. At a time when government and society seem to be obsessed with the falling birthrate, big is best, although only if you are white, middle-class and Spanish. Immigrant families,

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<sup>45</sup> The PIAF states that: “La gran mayoría de los españoles vivimos en una familia: 38.848.133 de una población total de 39.852.651 habitantes” (MTAS, 2002: 108).

<sup>46</sup> See INE (1991b) [accessed 18.8.08], and compare INE (1991a) [accessed 18.8.08] with INE (2001) [accessed 9.6.05].

<sup>47</sup> INE (2004) [accessed 11.6.05].

<sup>48</sup> MTAS (2002: 111). My italics.

mentioned only once in the PIAF, are automatically categorised as “familias en situaciones especiales”, and placed alongside single-parent families, and victims of domestic violence.<sup>49</sup> In another part of the text a paragraph about increasing levels of separation and divorce is followed by one about the need to tackle domestic violence; a way of arranging information that tacitly disassociates The Neoconservative Family from domestic violence. This violence is allied instead with family breakdown; therefore making single-parent families guilty by association.<sup>50</sup> After all, to recognise domestic violence as a potentially integral part of all and any family forms would be to destabilise the powerful notion of The Traditional Family as an “unproblematic haven of harmony” that The Neoconservative Family revolves around.<sup>51</sup>

The discourses surrounding The Neoconservative Family go through the motions of expressing the need for greater equality between men and women but do little to facilitate it actively, an unreflexive half-measure that is almost the same as supporting the *status quo* of The Traditional Family. Nowhere is this more evident than in the rhetoric of Catholic-inspired family values campaigns that appeared with particular force between 1996 and 2004 (and beyond) that have cast The Neoconservative Family in the role of the ‘good family’. So-called ‘pro-family’ organisations formed during this period include the Foro Español de la Familia (FEF), created in 1999, and the Instituto de Política Familiar (IPF), established in 2000.<sup>52</sup> Using the language of democracy and human rights as a means to exclude families that are perceived as deviating from the heterosexual ‘norm’, they have launched

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>50</sup> Although much debated under the PP, legislation to combat domestic violence was not passed until December 2004 when it was pushed through by the newly re-elected PSOE, see *Ley Orgánica 1/2004* [accessed 17.12.07].

<sup>51</sup> Weeks (1991: 220).

<sup>52</sup> The FEF describes itself as a “civil” forum, however its rhetoric is distinctly pious and many of its member organisations define themselves as Catholic, see FEF (2004a) [accessed 24.10.07].

campaigns appealing to popular concerns and emotions. For example, after their re-election in 2004, the PSOE's move to widen legal definitions of family by legalising gay marriage and adoption was met by PP and church-backed public demonstrations that championed the slogans "La familia SÍ importa. Por el derecho a una madre y un padre. Por la libertad" and "Matrimonio SÍ".<sup>53</sup> In these terms diversity is (re)presented as deviance and disintegration, a crisis afflicting The Neoconservative Family, that if not fixed will lead to collective moral meltdown.<sup>54</sup> However, what conservative values only seem to be able to comprehend as family breakdown, more liberal perspectives view simply as evidence that the ever-widening gap between diverse lived experiences of family and an increasingly out-of-date ideal.

#### **0.2.4 In Opposition: The Postmodern Family**

By evoking The Neoconservative Family and The Postmodern Family I am not suggesting that ideologies of family can or should be reduced to just these two positions. Keeping in mind the constraints inherent in thinking that relies on binary structures this thesis argues, nevertheless, that at the turn of the twenty-first century, a struggle for hegemony can be discerned between two family ideologies that can usefully be identified in this way. Jorge Grau Rebollo argues that the changes this diversity embodies "no acabarán con la familia, sino con cierta forma de entenderla".<sup>55</sup> Advocates of The Neoconservative Family tend to present it as the

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<sup>53</sup> See FEF (2005) [accessed 17.11.08] and matrimoniosi.org [accessed 20.11.08].

<sup>54</sup> See the moral panic inflected rhetoric of S.O.S. Familia website [accessed 20.11.08], particularly in their pieces "Ataques a la familia" and "Crisis de la Familia" in the section "Todo sobre la familia".

<sup>55</sup> Grau Rebollo (2002: 101). Visual anthropologist Jorge Grau Rebollo has written the only monograph devoted solely to the analysis of audiovisual representations of family. In it he systematically describes how 100 commercial films, a *teleserie* and 17 journalistic television reports made in Catalunya and the rest of Spain between 1958 and 1994 do or do not reflect dominant family forms and practices in Spain, which he sets out as urban and middle-class in the first six chapters. The broad nature of Grau Rebollo's survey, and the way he privileges social context and content over formal aspects, mean that he ultimately gives scant attention to how individual texts produce



binary opposite of The Postmodern Family, whereas the latter does not tend to be defined in opposition, but rather through a process of rupture and continual questioning. The following description of family, given by Young, captures the shift in understanding that characterises The Postmodern Family:

People who live together and/or share resources necessary to the means of life and comfort; who are committed to taking care of one another's physical and emotional needs to the best of their ability; who conceive themselves in a relatively long term, if not permanent, relationship; *and who recognize themselves as a family.*<sup>56</sup>

Understood in this way, family does not have to be synonymous with the socially constituted roles of Mother, Father and Child, and Church/State sanctioned marriage is not the only guarantor of commitment and stability. Instead the emphasis falls upon the self-recognition and validation of the kind of intimate relations and living arrangements that the PSOE's *Políticas para el bienestar de las familias* (PBF) describes as, "todas aquellas formas de convivencia, que ya no son sólo matrimoniales, y que afectan a un grupo humano que *decide* mantener una relación estable".<sup>57</sup> In this way, the PSOE uses the rhetoric of democracy and human rights to include and embrace diversity as a means of moving forwards, rather than as a means to exclude and only look back.<sup>58</sup>

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meaning. Moreover, although he raises some interesting questions about the role these texts have had in the formation of family ideologies and the acculturation of individuals in his concluding remarks (2002: 279-281), these are subsumed by his primary aim of confirming his initial hypothesis that audiovisual documents can and should be considered valid ethnographic sources for social sciences researchers interested in the family.

<sup>56</sup> Young (1996: 262). My italics.

<sup>57</sup> PSOE (2002: 9) [accessed 18.8.08]. My italics.

<sup>58</sup> "Los ciudadanos buscan familias más *democráticas*, en las que la *justicia interna* coincide con la justicia que se predica en la propia sociedad. Los nuevos modelos de familia, sobre la base de esos principios, pueden coadyudar a que emerja una *democracia social y política más avanzada, más compleja*, pero también más adaptada a los tiempos que nos van a tocar vivir" (PSOE, 2002: 11) [accessed 18.8.08]. My italics.

Stacey argues that in recent years gay and lesbian families have represented “such a new, embattled, visible and necessarily self-conscious, genre of postmodern kinship”, that it has made them the ideal platform from which to “expose the widening gap between the complex reality of postmodern family forms and the simplistic modern family ideology that still undergirds most public rhetoric, policy and law.”<sup>59</sup> That is to say that the lived realities of ‘gay/queer families’, or to use Kath Weston’s term “families of choice”, have challenged the automatic association of family with heterosexuality, marriage, procreation, and traditional gender roles and hierarchies.<sup>60</sup> Lately this widening gap has become most visible in the Spanish context in the divergence between national and regional laws relating to *parejas de hecho* (civil partnerships). The possibility of a nationwide *parejas de hecho* law that would apply to both hetero and homosexual couples, present in the PSOE’s 1996 Election Manifesto and broached by central government in 1997, came to nothing under the PP. However, by May 2003 eleven of the seventeen Comunidades Autónomas, which under devolution had been given a degree of jurisdiction over the family, had passed legislation allowing same-sex couples to contract legal rights and duties. These regional laws demonstrate a willingness to tackle certain family-related issues that central government was failing or unwilling to address.<sup>61</sup>

In coining the term The Postmodern Family, Stacey warns that it is:

Not a new model of family life, not the next stage in an orderly progression of family history, but the stage when the belief in a logical progression of stage breaks down. Rupturing evolutionary models of family history and

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<sup>59</sup> Stacey (2001: 197).

<sup>60</sup> Weston (1991: 110-111).

<sup>61</sup> See Pichardo Galán (2003) [accessed 14.7.08].

incorporating both experimental and nostalgic elements, ‘the’ postmodern family lurches forward and backward into an uncertain future.<sup>62</sup>

The uncertainty that develops out of a refusal to take familial forms and functions for granted represents a meditative quality, a demand that we think about who and what constitutes a family (meaning/signified) rather than simply participating. At the same time this inquisitive process is predicated on the notion that there is no single, universal answer, but rather what Hall would call the product of “articulations”, the bringing together of diverse elements through which meanings of The Postmodern Family are created through a continual process of becoming.<sup>63</sup> As indicated above, The Postmodern Family is clearly inscribed in the PSOE’s discourses on family, it is also imprinted on the language and behaviour of a number of (gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered) GLBT publications, organisations and activists.<sup>64</sup>

In response to those who find this plurality of meaning threatening, Weeks maintains that this uncertainty does not imply “an easy acceptance of everything that exists”.<sup>65</sup> Expounding on his notion of “ethical pluralism” in the postmodern era he suggests that, importantly, it challenges us to assess “the principles that make a pluralistic society possible”.<sup>66</sup> Stimulated by these debates is the growing propensity not to focus on what forms families should or should not take, but rather to think in

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<sup>62</sup> Stacey (1998: 18).

<sup>63</sup> See Hall (1996: 141-143).

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, the work of campaigners like Pedro Zerolo, Boti Rodrigo and Beatriz Gimeno, publications like Fundación Triángulo’s bi-annual journal *Orientaciones: Revista de homosexualidades*, and the websites for El Casal Lambda [accessed 7.1.09], the Federación Estatal de Lesbianas, Gays y Transexuales (FELGTB) [accessed 7.1.09] and Fundación Triángulo [accessed 7.1.09]. The latter are the major GLBT umbrella organisations in Spain. It should be noted here that no single GLBT discourse on the family exists in Spain, organisations that designate themselves as GLBT tend to fight for equal rights but at the same time resist being considered as a homogenous community with a unified voice.

<sup>65</sup> Weeks (1991: 230).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

terms of “doing family life”.<sup>67</sup> As the PBF notes, “la transición del modelo tradicional al actual ha propiciado que la familia se especialice en dos funciones esenciales: la socialización de los hijos y la estabilidad psíquica y afectiva de los adultos”.<sup>68</sup> That is, The Postmodern Family may take any shape, however, what is important is the social, physical, economic and emotional work that membership of this group entails and how this is carried out.

### **0.2.5 In Conclusion**

Even a preliminary study, such as that carried out in this section, leads us to recognise that until the nineties the dominant family ideology, although not entirely static, has nevertheless remained largely the same for at least the last hundred years. That is to say that that which might be called The Traditional Family, The Francoist Family, The Transitional Family and The Neoconservative Family have all been variations on a common theme, the white, middle-class, patriarchal, heterosexual, conjugal, biological, nuclear family. However, by the nineties, the legislative changes and moral shifts of the post-Franco, post-feminist era had begun to take hold. Factors that together with the broadening of reproductive rights through birth control and reproductive technologies and adoption regulations have helped to uncouple sexual activity, heterosexuality and marriage from parenting.<sup>69</sup> In popular and political discourses surrounding moral panic about family decline in recent years, The Francoist Family, generally evoked as The Traditional Family, continues to be nostalgically associated with a lost era of supposedly happier times. At the same time, the years between 1996 and 2004, despite being associated with a return to entrenched

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<sup>67</sup> Silva and Smart (1999: 7). See also Morgan’s influential work on “family practices” (1996: 16).

<sup>68</sup> PSOE (2002: 10) [accessed 18.8.08].

<sup>69</sup> Contraception was decriminalised in 1978. Spain’s first sperm bank opened the same year, and assisted reproduction reached a sufficient level that the *Ley 35/1988* [accessed 24.11.08] was created to regulate it.

conservatism in Spain, are of particular interest because it is during this period that it is possible to start to discern the growing prominence of and support for The Postmodern Family.

### 0.3 Filmic Contexts: Representations of Family in Spanish Film

#### 0.3.1 The Francoist Family: Collusion and Subversion

Harsh post-civil war conditions, Helen Graham observes, meant that in lived reality many Spaniards only survived “within alternative structures not remotely resembling the Francoist ‘model’ family”.<sup>70</sup> Despite this, the regime’s zealous censors tried to ensure that this was the ideal upheld in most of the cultural texts produced between 1939 and 1977.<sup>71</sup> Incentives to support the regime’s ideology were also put in place in the early forties, with directors whose films supported the approved vision of The Francoist Family more likely to be awarded lucrative official prizes, a *Premio Nacional de Cinematografía* [PNC] and/or have their film declared *de Interés Nacional* [IN]. Recipients that epitomised such support included: José Luis Sáenz de Heredia’s Franco penned *Raza* (1941, PNC), that rewrites centuries of Spanish history as a family melodrama pitting the good brother against the bad “in a struggle to define the true nature of the national community”;<sup>72</sup> Luis Lucia’s *Currito de la Cruz* (1948, PNC) that blended bullfighting with the moral melodrama posed by single motherhood;<sup>73</sup> Ladislao Vajda’s *Marcelino pan y vino* (1955, PNC, IN), “the first and

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<sup>70</sup> Graham (1995b: 192).

<sup>71</sup> See Bentley (2008: 85-87 and 226-227).

<sup>72</sup> D’Lugo (1997a: 93). See also Hardcastle (2009) [accessed 12.8.09] for a stimulating discussion of *Raza* as a “male melodrama”.

<sup>73</sup> See Galán (1985) [accessed 12.8.09].

most famous of the orphan melodrama cycle”;<sup>74</sup> Fernando Palacios’s *La gran familia* (1962, PNC), a choral comedy that incorporates a melodramatic lost child narrative; and Pedro Masó’s “‘serious current-day issues’ melodrama” *Experiencia prematrimonial* (1972, PNC).<sup>75</sup>

Controversially declared *de Interés Nacional* by the then Director General of Cinema (DGC) José María García Escudero, José Antonio Nieves Conde’s *Surcos* (1951) provoked vehement criticism from Francoist stalwarts. The film, which charts the difficulties and eventual moral downfall of a rural family who migrate to Madrid, aroused suspicion because of its bleak visual style and choice of subject matter that right-wing commentators associated with ‘dangerous’ left-wing filmmaking. The strength of opinion against *Surcos* was such that García Escudero, despite being a committed Falangist, was forced to resign as DGC after just seven months, and the national interest prize was reassigned to Juan de Orduña’s more blatantly patriotic *Alba de América* (1951) in 1952.<sup>76</sup> Both at the time and subsequently, aesthetic parallels were drawn between *Surcos* and Italian Neo-Realism, and it has also been heralded as marking “the beginnings of opposition cinema” in Spain.<sup>77</sup> Yet although it can be seen as a landmark film due to the ‘liberal’ credentials it garnered, and the consternation it caused among the Francoist establishment, ideologically *Surcos* can nevertheless be read as overwhelmingly conforming to and reinforcing dominant notions of gender roles and power dynamics associated with The Francoist Family. In particular, its narrative resolution restores the ‘natural’ patriarchal order as the

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<sup>74</sup> Smith (2000b: 63). Other films belonging to this cycle include the singing child-star vehicles *El ruiseñor de las cumbres* (Antonio del Amo, 1958) featuring Joseltio, and *Ha llegado un ángel* (Luis Lucia, 1961) in which a family is reformed and won over by an orphaned Marisol.

<sup>75</sup> Triana Toribio (2003: 99 and 104-107).

<sup>76</sup> See Bentley (2008: 117-118).

<sup>77</sup> Graham and Labanyi (1995: 433).

father/husband reasserts his authority. John Hopewell describes the film as a curious mix of American gangster thriller, neo-realism and “Falangist thesis drama”,<sup>78</sup> while Marsha Kinder argues that it uses melodrama as its “unifying system of narration”, a system that may be conceived of as the regime’s “official organizing narrative”.<sup>79</sup> However, the custom of using melodrama to displace the political onto the domestic realm meant that representations of family became a site of ideological struggle for both pro-Franco and dissident filmmakers. Likewise directors of both political persuasions made use of the melodramatic.

The films of Juan Antonio Bardem, a card-carrying member of the then illegal *Partido Comunista Español*, are perhaps the most powerful illustrations of what Kinder calls this “subversive reinscription of melodrama”.<sup>80</sup> His *Muerte de un ciclista* (1955), *Calle Mayor* (1956), *La venganza* (1959) and *Nunca pasa nada* (1965), were all awarded PNCs and yet they all also suffered at the hands of the censors.<sup>81</sup> Although these films employ a realist or neorealist aesthetic, their intimate narratives about the extra-marital affairs of the bourgeoisie, love-cheated provincial spinsters, family feuds and love-less marriages are squarely in melodramatic territory.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, on closer inspection elements of their cinematography and mise-en-scène emphasise artifice over reality and, as is characteristic of melodrama, excessive emotions and desires that cannot be expressed are channelled into objects and spaces that become over-charged with meaning. Framing and orchestral music are used to

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<sup>78</sup> Hopewell (1986: 56).

<sup>79</sup> Kinder (1993: 42) and (1989: 5). Together with Katherine Singer Kovács, Kinder organised the first major Spanish cinema retrospective in the United States in 1989. Spanning 82 years of filmmaking the retrospective covered a wide selection of films ranging from Segundo de Chomón’s *El hotel eléctrico* (1905) to José Luis Borau’s *Tata mía* (1987), they created the programme around “The Politics of Family and Gender”. See Kinder (1989) and Dunning (1990) [accessed 4.9.08].

<sup>80</sup> Kinder (1993: 54-86).

<sup>81</sup> See Egido (1983: 31-52).

<sup>82</sup> Other films that work in a similar manner include Manuel Summers’s *Del rosa... al amarillo* (1963), Miguel Picazo’s *La tía Tula* (1964) and Jaime de Armiñán’s *Mi querida señorita* (1972).

intensify the moral turmoil of repressed and conflicted protagonists. This critical use of The Traditional Family and melodrama could be understood as central to Bardem's attempt to "mostrar en términos de luz, de imágenes y de sonidos la realidad de nuestro contorno, aquí y hoy. Ser testimonio del momento humano".<sup>83</sup> Yet while he and his films gained respect and awards in Cannes and Venice they made little impact at the Spanish box office.

Although the majority of high-grossing 'popular' films released during Franco's time in power seemed to conform straightforwardly to the dominant National-Catholic ideology, academics have recently started to suggest how these films, even those rewarded by the state, might be re-evaluated through oppositional readings. Examples include the readings 'against the grain' of Palacios's *La gran familia*. A film that Sally Faulkner describes as, "a 104-minute version of Franco awarding a prize to the parents of a large family",<sup>84</sup> it follows a year in the lives of a happily married couple, their fifteen children and a grandfather who all cheerfully share a three bedroomed flat on the outskirts of Madrid, while miraculously surviving on one parental salary. On the basis of their respective close readings of aspects such as music, actors/actresses' star images, performance, fantasy, exaggeration and predictability in *La gran familia*, Peter William Evans and Faulkner come to suggest that these are sites where the excesses, contradictions and fissures usually hidden beneath the surface of Francoist ideology become apparent.<sup>85</sup> These indicate the contradictions and cracks in The Francoist Family that would deepen over time, and are increasingly dealt with more explicitly in the film's sequels *La familia y... uno más* (Palacios, 1965) and *La familia, bien, gracias* (Masó, 1979). Read in this manner,

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<sup>83</sup> Faulkner (2006: 8), quoting Bardem writing in 1956.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>85</sup> See Evans (2000a) and Faulkner (2006: 27-72).



Faulkner claims, these commercial comedies “look forward to dissident Spanish cinema’s treatment of the same subject”.<sup>86</sup>

Arguably, some of the films that commented most incisively on the discrepancies between lived experience in Spain and the regime’s stance on The Traditional Family are black comedies like dissident directors Bardem and José Luis García Berlanga’s *Esa pareja feliz* (1951, but released in 1953), Marco Ferreri’s *El pisito* (1958) and García Berlanga’s *El verdugo* (1964). Firmly realistic in their mise-en-scène, but working in the comic mode, these films revolve around couples whose attempts to marry and start a family are frustrated or thwarted by the deprivations of the post-war period. Similarly, in García Berlanga’s *Plácido* (1961) dark esperpentic humour is used to frame a stark depiction of a working-class family’s chaotic struggle to eke out a living alongside the ordered social hypocrisy of wealthy host families, who deign to “sit a poor person at their table”.<sup>87</sup> Other examples of comedy being used to explore the cracks in The Francoist Family include the later films *Vida conyugal sana* (Roberto Bodegas, 1974), and *Mi mujer es decente dentro de lo que cabe* (Antonio Drove, 1975), which are associated with the *tercera vía*.<sup>88</sup> Meanwhile the titles of more facile comedies like Javier Aguirre’s *Soltera y madre en la vida* (1969), Ramón Fernández’s *Los novios de mi mujer* (1972), and Pedro Lazaga’s *El alegre divorciado* (1975) promised a fracturing of the traditional family, but ultimately delivered censor-friendly endings that firmly reinforced the institutions of Family and Marriage.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Faulkner (2006: 45). In a similar vein see Labanyi (2002) and Woods (2004) on the ambivalent relationship of folkloric film musicals to the regime’s ideological position, and Evans (2004) on the tensions embodied in the figure and work of starlet Marisol (Pepa Flores).

<sup>87</sup> See Evans (2000b) and Marsh (2006: 122-144).

<sup>88</sup> See Higginbotham (1988: 69-70).

<sup>89</sup> See Bentley (2008: 204 and 218) and Triana Toribio (2003: 104-107).

Echoing Bardem's criticism of Spanish cinema at the Conversaciones Cinematográficas de Salamanca in 1955 as "políticamente ineficaz, socialmente falso, intelectualmente ínfimo, estéticamente nulo, industrialmente raquítico",<sup>90</sup> García Escudero championed what he termed *cine social* both as a writer and as DGC (1951-1952 and 1962-1967).<sup>91</sup> He was also something of an intellectual snob and envisaged *cine social* as a more rigorous, intellectual, 'masculine' cinema grounded in a specifically Spanish reality. This, he believed, would be the best basis for a new (exportable) national cinema to rival the international success of Italian Neo-Realism and the French *Nouvelle Vague*, and was exemplified for him in *Surcos* and Bardem's *Calle Mayor* (1956).<sup>92</sup> These convictions led García Escudero, somewhat incongruously for a committed Falangist and staunch Catholic, to fight for a degree of institutional support for the Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía (EOC) graduates Carlos Saura, José Luis Borau, Miguel Picazo, Mario Camus, Basilio Martín Patino, Víctor Erice and Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, whose subversive filmmaking would come to define the *Nuevo Cine Español* (NCE).

The films of these NCE directors were held up as shining examples of liberal Spanish cinema on the international festival circuit, and by inference as exemplary of a liberal Spain, but at home they still had to appease the censors. Nevertheless, they made an art form out of developing very personal, intellectual, auteurist responses to the impediments and restrictions imposed upon them. The result tended to be a densely metaphorical, oblique form of realism, and narratives that centred around disturbed and disturbing families, such as those in Saura's *La madriguera* (1969), *El*

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<sup>90</sup> Egado (1983: 50), quoting Bardem. The following section will discuss the revival of the term *cine social* at the turn of the twenty-first century.

<sup>91</sup> See, for example, García Escudero's tome *Cine social*, first published in 1958, and his *Cine español* (1962).

<sup>92</sup> See Hopewell (1986: 65).

*jardín de las delicias* (1970), *Ana y los lobos* (1973) or *La prima Angélica* (1974), Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena* (1973) or Borau's *Furtivos* (1975). These films would seem to confirm Paul Gilbert's argument that to abandon the family to the Right is "to retreat from a politically important battleground".<sup>93</sup> Their use of the figure of the dysfunctional family, not magically put back together by 'happy endings', as a means to subvert, can be read as a challenge to dominant ideology. In her seminal article on the NCE directors Kinder, borrowing Borau's description of his generation of filmmakers, names them "the children of Franco".<sup>94</sup> She later develops this argument in relation to Erice's *El espíritu*, arguing that "the children of Franco would turn out to be the children of Frankenstein".<sup>95</sup> This is a sentiment also expressed in the saying on which the title of Saura's film *Cría cuervos...* (1976) is based, "cría cuervos y te sacarán los ojos". Presented in the opening credit sequence of the film through typical family photographs, The Francoist Family is systematically dismantled and demythified during the course of the narrative by a child of Franco. However, echoing the uncertainties of the times in which it was shot and released, the film's ending leaves unresolved the question of whether, after the father's [Franco's] death Ana (Ana Torrent) and her generation would grow up to be the rebellious *cuervos* of the film's title, or whether, like her mother María (Geraldine Chaplin), they would meekly submit to the social roles prescribed by the regime.

In her analysis of Borau's *Furtivos* (1975) and Gutiérrez Aragón's *Camada negra* (1977) Kinder identifies what she deems to be Spanish cinema's distinctive reinscription and subversion of the Oedipal narrative and Oedipal family conflicts. She traces the films' "perverse displacements" between the mother and the father

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<sup>93</sup> Gilbert (1999: 142).

<sup>94</sup> Kinder (1983: 59).

<sup>95</sup> Kinder (1993: 129).

back to the collective trauma of the fratricidal Civil War and the (patriarchal) character of the subsequent dictatorship, and suggests that because censorship rendered the crimes of the father [Franco] unmentionable, they were projected onto the mother [the *madre patria*] instead.<sup>96</sup> Consequently overbearing mothers are made to represent the Francoist system and its reproduction, while acts of matricide come to mitigate “the father’s responsibility for violence against mothers and children and the son’s responsibility for desiring to be like the father”.<sup>97</sup> In this way the mother in her role within The Francoist Family is represented as a product and a (re)producer, an emblem and a victim of the oppressive patriarchal system.

### 0.3.2 The Family in Transition: Disrupting Tradition

During the early years of the transition the experiences of a generation of Spaniards damaged by and/or disillusioned with the The Francoist Family were played out in a number of films, including Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón’s *Camada negra* (1977), Jaime de Armiñán’s *El nido* (1980) and Josefina Molina’s *Función de noche* (1981). For example, D’Lugo argues that the latter, based on the Miguel Delibes novel *Cinco horas con Mario* (1966), probes “the consciousness of a couple whose experience of marriage, family and sexuality were largely shaped by Francoist cultural ideology in the repressive atmosphere of the Spanish provinces”.<sup>98</sup> At different moments in the film, both the wife (Lola Herrera) and the husband (Daniel Dicenta), utter the line “Nos han estafado”, a distinctly ghostly echo of María’s deathbed cry, “Me han engañado”, in *Cría cuervos...*. The “engaño” or “estafa” here would seem to be the Regime’s claim that acceptance of the gendered roles and power

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 234. See also Hopewell (1986: 100-104) and Fiddian (1989) on the figure of the devouring mother, while Evans (1999: 118 and 127) and Deleyto (1999a) use Creed’s concept of the “monstrous feminine” to discuss castrating “phallic mothers”.

<sup>98</sup> D’Lugo (1997a: 59).

dynamic of The Francoist Family, especially for women, was *the* path to personal fulfilment. This is a claim that these and many other films of the Transition worked to dismantle, often through sex or violence, in a cinema no longer tethered by censorship.<sup>99</sup>

A number of films made after 1975 draw not only on the historical associations of The Traditional Family but also on its ambiguities, in order to mediate critical explorations of gender inequality. For example, *La mitad del cielo* (Gutiérrez Aragón, 1986), set against the years of political and economic *apertura*, traces the changing status of women in Spanish society through four generations of women from the same family. Gutiérrez Aragón's use of *mise-en-scène* and framing functions to usurp traditional images of male authority and visually transfer power to the figure of the matriarch, the protagonist Rosa's (Ángela Molina) inimitable *abuela* (Margarita Lozano).<sup>100</sup> In *Gary Cooper que estás en los cielos* (Pilar Miró, 1980) Andrea (Mercedes Sampietro) has chosen to reject tradition and develop her career rather than have a family life, a balance that is reconsidered through the experiences of Carmen (also played by Sampietro) in her later film *El pájaro de la felicidad* (1993).<sup>101</sup>

Other films have used family as one of the key motifs through which to investigate questions of regional nationalisms in Spain. Rob Stone suggests that the ironic tone of Julio Medem's *Vacas* (1992), a family saga, revises and challenges the mythical purity and coherence of more deferential literary and cinematic portraits of Basqueness that were produced in the early years of democracy.<sup>102</sup> Meanwhile, Juan José Bigas Luna's playfully surreal coming-of-age tale *La teta i la lluna* (1994)

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<sup>99</sup> For an overview of how cinema made in Spain during the transition represented the "descomposición" of the traditional family see González Manrique (2008: 7-16).

<sup>100</sup> See Bentley (1995).

<sup>101</sup> See Gámez Fuentes (2003: 40-42).

<sup>102</sup> Stone (2007: 51-67).

refigures, Marvin D'Lugo argues, notions “of Spanish family ties within a larger, ‘European’ context”.<sup>103</sup> Child protagonist Tete’s (Biel Durán) exogamous desire for the French dancer Estrella (Mathilda May), the embodiment of an alluring “Europeanized future”, guides him away from static forms of Iberian identity that is symbolized by the patriarchal, phallic world of the Catalan family.<sup>104</sup>

Eloy de la Iglesia’s controversial films *Los placeres ocultos* (1976), *La criatura* (1977), *El diputado* (1978), *Navajeros* (1980), *La mujer del ministro* (1981), *Colegas* (1982), *El pico* (1983) and *El pico 2* (1984), are all firmly located in the Spain of the transition through their references to actual historical events, naturalistic mise-en-scène and narrative focus on subjects that had been taboo under Franco. Families or familial relations provide the context for most of these provocative social melodramas, which make their political (left-wing) intent explicit, and bring homosexuality, juvenile delinquency, drug addiction, abortion, corruption, separatist and national politics and class tensions centre screen.<sup>105</sup> Stephen Tropiano reads de la Iglesia’s tendency to infuse homosexuality within heterosexual/familial relations as a strategy through which the director “disrupts and reconfigures patriarchal institutions”.<sup>106</sup> As in so many films during the transition and beyond *The Traditional Family and Marriage*, because of the ideological weight they bore under Francoism, are used to epitomise tradition and the past. Smith maintains, for example, that in *El pico* de la Iglesia’s use of mise-en-scène and long single takes function to present family as “an ideological space, the point of struggle between new subjectivities and

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<sup>103</sup> D’Lugo (1997b: 206).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-212. The drama behind this footnote deserves a film of its own!

<sup>105</sup> This is a combination that has led some to draw parallels between his work and that of Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Pier Paolo Pasolini. See Hopewell (1986: 221), Murray (1998: 41) and Lucas (2001) [accessed 24.11.08].

<sup>106</sup> Tropiano (1997: 175).

old power structures”.<sup>107</sup> However, they are also often presented, not without tension, as loci of social/interpersonal transition where love may also drive change.

De la Iglesia’s cinema has received negligible scholarly attention relative to his strong performance at the box office. Smith, one of the few scholars to study the director’s films in any depth, points out that this is because they are not deemed to be “academically respectable”.<sup>108</sup> One of the most recent and perhaps most significant examples of de la Iglesia’s, quite literal, marginalisation in scholarly writing is his appearance only in two brief footnotes in Núria Triana Toribio’s key book *Spanish National Cinema*.<sup>109</sup> His films were also unpopular with his contemporary critics, conservative and progressive alike, who tended to condemn his cinema as crudely topical, aesthetically inferior, vulgarly commercial Manichaeic melodramas undeserving of intellectual attention.<sup>110</sup> This denigration of de la Iglesia’s films in which topicality and a realist aesthetic are combined with popular elements is, in itself, worthy of further investigation. However, it is introduced here, and revisited in critical framework section, because similar arguments are echoed in some of the analysis of the films that form the focus of this thesis.

Pedro Almodóvar, that most gregarious of post-1975 filmmakers, is the creator of some of Spanish cinema’s most outrageous families. Indeed, to the oft-used term

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<sup>107</sup> Smith (1992: 155).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 129-162. Other, predominantly brief, studies include Hopewell (1986: 221-223), De Stefano (1986: 58-60), Aguilar (1996), Tropiano (1997: 157-177), Melero Salvador (2004) and Feenstra (2006: 45-47 and 149-163) and (2007: 205-215).

<sup>109</sup> One footnote quotes de la Iglesia’s opinions on the *ley Miró*, while the other, somewhat ironically, reproduces Smith’s observation that although a prominent maker of thrillers in the late seventies and early eighties the director has been “exclu[ded] from both national and regional histories of film” (Smith 1992: 129) (Triana Toribio, 2003: 172). Similarly de la Iglesia only receives a passing mention in the recent book devoted to acknowledging Spanish popular film, see Lázaro-Reboll and Willis (Eds) (2004: 12 and 20).

<sup>110</sup> Feenstra (2006: 150-151), quotes extracts from hostile reviews of *El diputado*. Other examples include two particularly vitriolic reviews by Fernando Trueba (1979a) and (1979b) [both accessed 24.11.08].

“las chicas Almodóvar” we could add “las familias Almodóvar”, to refer both to the group of actress and actors he gathers around him and to the multiplicity of family forms, relationships and living arrangements that appear in his films. A number of scholars have argued that the dismantling and demythification of The (biological, heterosexual, bourgeois) Family, together with positive representations of alternative families, constitute key recurring themes in Almodóvar’s films.<sup>111</sup> For Mark Allinson, Almodóvar has come to be symbolic of a free and democratic Spain “as its chronicler and as its *agent provocateur*”, with his work capturing a “radical break” with the past, constituting a form of “cultural revolution” that compensates for the absence of a political one.<sup>112</sup> Similarly D’Lugo maintains that the socio-political tensions between Spain’s past and present are inscribed in Almodóvar’s films in “the melodrama of the traditional Spanish family in crisis and [...] ‘the obligatory counter-family’”.<sup>113</sup> One of the most iconic of these counter-families or “familias Almodóvar” is that formed by Pablo (Eusebio Poncela), Tina (Carmen Maura) and Ada (Manuela Velasco) in *La ley del deseo* (1987). The film’s melodramatic backstory and subplot of father-son/daughter incest and failed mothering function to challenge the validity and privileged position of The (biological, heterosexual) Family. At the same time the film’s matter-of-fact presentation of non-normative domesticity serves a political point as it calls attention to “the daily life of ‘pretended families’ who do not experience their position as marginal”.<sup>114</sup> Nevertheless, Almodóvar introduces contradictions through his idiosyncratic and excessive visual and narrative style, reminiscent of Douglas Sirk whose work he often references, thereby making his

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<sup>111</sup> See Triana Toribio (1999: 234), Allinson (2001: 63), Ballesteros (2001: 275), D’Lugo (2006: 50) and Acevedo-Muñoz (2007: 14).

<sup>112</sup> Allinson (2001: 3).

<sup>113</sup> D’Lugo (2006: 50). D’Lugo borrows the term “counter-family” from Evans (1993).

<sup>114</sup> Smith (1992: 191-192).



work less about positive images and more about hostility towards “fixed positions of all kinds”.<sup>115</sup> As such his representations of families may arguably best be read, not as reflections of changing social realities, but rather as celebrations of rupture and transition per se.

### 0.3.3 The Turn of the 21st Century Family: Eclectic Representations

Smith suggests that we can view the eighties as a period characterised by “the shift from the family to the couple as the basic narrative and ideological unit”.<sup>116</sup> However, this thesis contends that from the mid-nineties onwards the pendulum seems to swing back towards families. Noting that it is most often explored through questions of marriage and adultery, parent-child relations and/or mothering Miguel Ángel Huerta Floriano argues, that “la cuestión familiar es, junto al amor, la muerte o el deseo, uno de los temas más recurrentes del período [1994-1999]”.<sup>117</sup> Basing his work on discursive and thematic, rather than textual analysis, Huerta Floriano argues that representations of family are characterised by their heterogeneity, appearing in films across many different genres.

In reference to Almodóvar’s *Tacones lejanos* (1991) Smith contends that by the 1990s, when anything could be said because nothing was taboo, “the personal simply remains personal”, because family could no longer serve as “the arena for the return of the repressed psychic and social traumas”.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, Isolina Ballesteros argues that by the nineties the family had been relieved of the “peso simbólico” it carried in early work of Saura, Borau and Gutiérrez Aragón, and that challenging it no

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<sup>115</sup> Smith (2000a: 3).

<sup>116</sup> Smith (1992: 132).

<sup>117</sup> Huerta Floriano (2005a: 61).

<sup>118</sup> Smith (2000a: 130).

longer constituted a sublimated criticism of the Spanish political system.<sup>119</sup>

Nevertheless, based on her analysis of a range of post-1975 texts (films, novels and photographic exhibitions) Yeon-Soo Kim perceptively maintains that the family album motif “constitutes an invaluable analytical tool for the study of contemporary Spanish history” due to its position at the “crossroads between personal stories and public, official, historical discourses”.<sup>120</sup> That is to say that representations of The Family provide a means of expressing repressed personal and collective memories and, quite literally, bringing home the relationship between past and present.

Around the turn of the twenty-first century, when the recuperation of historical memory began to come to the fore in Spain, a number of films focus on the past’s impact on the present through individuals trying and failing/succeeding to come to terms with their family histories.<sup>121</sup> In his discussion of films by old and new generations of filmmakers working during the first half of the nineties, Carlos F. Heredero identifies what he describes as their “obsesión por bucear en el lado oscuro y en los secretos de la célula familiar”.<sup>122</sup> In *Leo* (José Luis Borau, 2000) and *Arderás conmigo* (Miguel Ángel Sánchez Sebastián, 2002) past incestuous relationships haunt the present and uneasy resolutions are found in the form of vengeful murders. In films like *África* (Alfonso Ungría, 1996), *Cascabel* (Daniel Cebrián, 1999), *Cuando vuelvas a mi lado* (Gracia Querejeta, 1999), *El otro barrio* (Salvador García Ruiz, 2000), *Cuando todo esté en orden* (César Martínez Herrada, 2002), *En la ciudad sin límites* (Antonio Hernández, 2002), *Héctor* (Querejeta, 2004) and *Frío sol del invierno*

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<sup>119</sup> Ballesteros (2001: 272).

<sup>120</sup> Kim (2005: 25 and 26).

<sup>121</sup> Several civil organisations devoted to the recovery of historical memory were formed around this time, perhaps most prominent has been the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica, founded by Emilio Silva and Santiago Macias in 2000, see Magone (2009: 37-38).

<sup>122</sup> Heredero (1997: 65).

(Pablo Malo, 2004) teenagers and adult offspring are only able to move forward after uncovering or confronting past family violence, traumas and/or secrets. Although formally very different from the above a similar theme runs through the thrillers *Los otros* (Alejandro Amenábar, 2001), *Nos miran* (Norberto López Amado, 2002), and *Darkness* (Jaume Balagueró, 2002). These are films that use the supernatural to frame family narratives, as unresolved pasts resurface or become superimposed on the present.

In recent years much attention has been given to a new generation of filmmakers, many born in the 1960s or later, who directed their first features in the 1990s or early 2000s.<sup>123</sup> If the NCE directors were, as discussed above, “the children of Franco”, this new generation could be identified as “the children of democracy”. It is notable that a number of this generation’s *operas primas* have revolved around families that were in some way broken or fragmented. Children go in search of mothers or fathers they have never known, have to deal with the absence or death of one or both parents, and/or endure problematic family relationships in films like Juanma Bajo Ulloa’s *Alas de mariposa* (1991), Querejeta’s *Una estación de paso* (1992), Bollaín’s *Hola, ¿estás sola?* (1995), Daniel Calparsoro’s *Salto al vacío* (1995), León de Aranoa’s *Familia* (1996), David Trueba’s *La buena vida* (1996), Benito Zambrano’s *Solas* (1999), Achero Mañas’s *El bola* (2000), Gonzalo Tapia’s *Lena* (2001) and Chiqui Carabante’s *Carlos contra el mundo* (2002). Heredero suggests that this fascination with affective and/or actual orphans may be attributable to “la carencia que puedan sentir los nuevos cineastas de referencias válidas para el

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<sup>123</sup> See Heredero (1999: 11-27), Jordan (2000: 184-191), Heredero and Santamarina (2002), Sanz (2006), Bentley (2008: 303-312) and Rodríguez Merchán and Fernández-Hoya (2008).

presente, de una tradición en la que insertarse”.<sup>124</sup> However, it seems just as likely that the kind of production logistics and costs involved in these small-scale, intimate family dramas constituted a more manageable project for first-time directors. Yet to credit this tendency solely to either of these factors is too simplistic, especially as more established directors have also demonstrated a fascination with these themes in films like *Éxtasis* (Mariano Barroso, 1996), *Como un relámpago* (Miguel Hermoso, 1996), *Todo sobre mi madre* (Almodóvar, 1999), and *León y Olvido* (Xavier Bermúdez, 2004).

Useful here is Huerta Floriano’s suggestion that directors turn to the family again and again because it is an intense site of emotional and psychological drama where conflicts, inadequacies and frustrations emerge and take their toll on the individual.<sup>125</sup> He argues that in films from the nineties the family is repeatedly depicted as “un nido de descomposición ética y, en la dirección contraria, como una hermosa fuerza capaz de aflorar los aspectos más nobles de la naturaleza humana”.<sup>126</sup> In films made in the 1990s and 2000s it seems that it has increasingly been The Traditional or Neoconservative Family that has embodied this former negative quality, while the latter has tended to be associated with alternative or postmodern family forms, values and practices. This tendency is particularly pronounced in *Familia*, *Solas*, *Flores de otro mundo*, *Poniente*, *Te doy mis ojos* and *Cachorro*, the group of films that form the focus of this thesis. These films raise and propose answers to the question of, what, at the turn of the twenty-first century in Spain, can or should family mean? As such these films can be understood as ideological sites of struggle where postmodern meanings of family are being imagined.

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<sup>124</sup> Heredero (1997: 65).

<sup>125</sup> Huerta Floriano (2005a: 62).

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

## 0.4 Critical Framework: Key Concepts and Approaches

### 0.4.1 (Re)viewing Genre

In the introduction to their groundbreaking edited volume on genre and contemporary Spanish film Jay Beck and Vicente Rodríguez Ortega observe that the majority of Spanish-language film scholarship takes a negative view of genre, because it assumes a direct link between generic conventions, commercialism and repressive ideological cultural projects under Franco.<sup>127</sup> They add that underlying this critical stance would seem to be the belief that genre films are “aesthetically, ideologically and often thematically lesser to the ‘true’ Spanish cinema”; that is, those films made by auteurs, “who manage to resist the vicissitudes of the market and make personal films that engage the shifting realities of the Spanish social fabric while complying with the models of visual and aural narration in the tradition of European art cinema”.<sup>128</sup>

These kinds of negative judgements of filmmakers’ use of generic elements would seem to be based on two lines of thinking.<sup>129</sup> On the one hand, they can be traced back to the discussions that accompanied the inception of film that were concerned with establishing it as an art form rather than vulgar entertainment or spectacle.<sup>130</sup> In this respect, therefore, these judgments threaten to reimpose hierarchical distinctions between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ cinema, or ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture that postmodern critics have worked to break down. On the other hand, they look back to a trend in film theory started by Jean-Luc Comolli and Paul Narboni that perceived

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<sup>127</sup> Beck and Rodríguez Ortega (2008: 8). Spanish-language film scholarship is identified by the authors as many of the commentaries produced by Juan Manuel Company, Román Gubern, Carlos Losilla, Juan de Mata Moncho, José Enrique Monterde, Jesús Palacios, Ángel Quintana, José Vanaclocha, Vicente Vergara and Núria Vidal.

<sup>128</sup> Beck and Rodríguez Ortega (2008: 8-9).

<sup>129</sup> Examples of these negative judgements are included in the discussion of *cine social* below.

<sup>130</sup> For an overview of this argument see Koppers (2000: 17-21).

genre films as uncritical vehicles of dominant ideology.<sup>131</sup> In addition, this paradigm deems genre films to be unable to carry political meanings, engage critically with reality or challenge dominant ideology, making these qualities the almost exclusive reserve of formally innovative cinema that questions the conventional language and imagery of realism. However, this stance relies on a conveniently simplistic notion of both genre and ideology.<sup>132</sup> Murray Smith has argued that although the cinema as a technology emerged from a bourgeois, patriarchal, capitalist society it does not follow that the potential ideological uses and effects of the cinematic apparatus cannot “outstrip its origins”.<sup>133</sup> Meanwhile, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson have pointed out, “on the whole, genre is a category best used to describe and analyse films, *not* to evaluate them”.<sup>134</sup> The analysis that follows seeks to set out and draw on a progressive and more constructive understanding of genre that expands the parameters within which it can be usefully applied.

Broadly speaking, genres are a means of categorising and describing films according to their subject matter, structure and style. Defining genres as multi-dimensional phenomena Steve Neale notes that they consist of codes and conventions, “specific systems of expectation and hypothesis which spectators bring with them to the cinema [... that] provide spectators with means of recognition and understanding”.<sup>135</sup> However, Rick Altman suggests that it is necessary to be wary of identifying genres as stable or discrete entities with clearly delineated borders, and

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<sup>131</sup> See Comolli and Narboni (1971a) and (1971b). Writing for the French journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* Comolli and Narboni applied Althusser’s work on ideology to film as a means of exposing realist (bourgeois, middlebrow) cinema as an unconscious instrument of ideology. During the 1970s this approach was taken up by *Screen* in Britain and *Jump Cut* and *Camera Obscura* in the US. Subsequent scholars influenced by this work have included, amongst others, Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey.

<sup>132</sup> See section 0.1.3 for a discussion of the way in which ideology is understood in this thesis.

<sup>133</sup> Smith, M. (2004: 9).

<sup>134</sup> Bordwell and Thompson (2004: 110).

<sup>135</sup> Neale (2000: 25) and (1990: 46).

warns that genre theorists' attempts to categorise films often involves a reductive tendency to forget or a suppression of aspects that do not fit neatly.<sup>136</sup> These considerations are particularly pertinent when studying genre in relation to Spanish films that often do not clearly belong to a single or even two genres. To simply accept already circulating genre categorisations is to fail to reflect on how and to what purposes filmmakers, the industry, critics, and academics position these texts. Consequently, existing genre labels are taken not as an end but as a point of departure for the close textual analysis in the following chapters attempts to discern how my case studies work with, around or against the way in which they have been classified.

Central to this thesis is an attempt to analyse and understand how films interact imaginatively with the social. Gledhill has argued that in order to do this it is necessary to develop "a concept of genre capable of exploring the wider contextual culture in relationship to, rather than as an originating source of, aesthetic mutations and textual complications".<sup>137</sup> This more fluid concept places a greater emphasis on the wider more flexible expressive modes, whether melodramatic, comic, realistic or tragic, woven into the fabric of the films under consideration. The notion of multiple modalities and sensibilities functioning together affords much greater flexibility when analysing how narrative strands and impulses, relationships between certain characters, events, situations, scenes and sequences work alongside and in contention with each other. As Gledhill notes, "[modality] like register in socio-linguistics, defines a specific mode of aesthetic articulation adaptable across a range of genres, across decades, and across national cultures".<sup>138</sup> In order to study the constantly intermingling expressive modes and imaginative sensibilities at work in these films,

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<sup>136</sup> Altman (1999: 18-19 and 54).

<sup>137</sup> Gledhill (2000: 221).

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

each chapter will consider cues ranging from the films' titles and publicity material (theatrical posters or dvd covers as applicable), to textual elements such as editing, lighting and sound. In doing this I will examine how these aspects mould horizons of expectation and/or position the spectator in relation to ideologies of the family.

#### **0.4.2 *Cine social*: Characteristics and Critical Trends**

As mentioned above, all of the key films under consideration in this thesis could be said to belong, in varying degrees, to the critical category of *cine social*. The more fluid concept of genre set out in the previous subsection is particularly helpful when engaging with all or part of the eclectic body of films that is often defined as *cine social*.<sup>139</sup> A seemingly self-explanatory and yet slippery term, *cine social* has recently been used by critics and academics to refer to a small wave of largely low-budget films released around the turn of the millennium that were socially engaged, critically well-received and some of which were a surprise success with audiences.<sup>140</sup> The initial group of León de Aranoa's *Barrio* (1998), *Solas* (1999), *Flores de otro mundo* (1999), and *El bola* (2000) is often expanded to include *Leo* (2000), *Poniente* (2002), *Los lunes al sol* (León de Aranoa, 2002), *Te doy mis ojos* (2003) and, at what could be called the high-budget end of *cine social*, Alejandro Amenábar's *Mar adentro* (2004) and Pedro Almodóvar's *La mala educación* (2004).<sup>141</sup> Critic Jesús

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<sup>139</sup> See Thibaudeau (2007: 243-245).

<sup>140</sup> *Barrio*, *Solas*, *El bola*, *Los lunes al sol* and *Te doy mis ojos* are notable examples of this critical and commercial success, see Primary Filmography for details of prizes awarded and box office performance for *Solas* and *Te doy*.

<sup>141</sup> See Triana Toribio (2003: 155-158), Jordan and Allinson (2005: 30), Vidal (2006: 183-186) and Quintana (2005: 15-23).



Ruiz Mantilla identifies this turn to socially committed filmmaking at the turn of the century not as specifically Spanish but as a European-wide phenomenon.<sup>142</sup>

There has been little or no recognition that *cine social* is not a term that simply sprang up along with these films in the 1990s, but rather one with a history in Spain that has seemingly been unquestioningly reappropriated by scholars. In her discussion of García Escudero (see 0.3.1), who seems to have been the first to use this term in relation to Spanish cinema at any length, Triana Toribio writes about his desire for the popular cinema of the fifties and sixties to be replaced by a more serious “cinema with problems”.<sup>143</sup> However, although Triana Toribio goes on to stress that this approach has been privileged by critics, the specialised press and national institutions, who continue to consider and support cinema with a social conscience as the most “legitimate Spanish cinema”, she only uses *cine social* to talk about films of the late nineties and beyond and makes no direct mention of the term in her remarks on García Escudero.<sup>144</sup>

Texts identified as *cine social* have been described as “social issue films”.<sup>145</sup> Hallam and Marshment maintain that in social issue films, “the individual’s problems present a problem *for* society (how to educate, to police, to contain, to treat), rather than being perceived as a problem created *by* society, a perspective often attributed to social realism”.<sup>146</sup> However, in *cine social* the individual’s problems are frequently

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<sup>142</sup> Ruiz Mantilla (2001) [accessed 10.9.08]. See Higbee (2005: 307-313) and O’Shaughnessy (2007) on the renewed political focus on the social in French cinema. See also Shaw (2007: 4-5) on the emergence of a number of Latin American films with a clear sociopolitical agenda.

<sup>143</sup> Triana Toribio (2003: 65-69). The irony being, of course, that censorship persistently hindered the making and distribution, and diluted the social relevance and critical potential of films that could be considered *cine social*, such as *Los golfos* (Saura, 1961), *Young Sánchez* (Mario Camus, 1964), *La tía Tula* (Miguel Picazo, 1964) and *Nueve cartas a Berta* (Basilio Martín Patino, 1967).

<sup>144</sup> Triana Toribio (2003: 155-158). Institutions here refers to the funding and prizes associated with the Academia de las Artes y las Ciencias Cinematográficas (AACC).

<sup>145</sup> See Begin (2008).

<sup>146</sup> Hallam and Marshment (2000: 190).

presented as both a problem *for* society *and* as a problem created *by* society, or inherent in established social structures such as The Traditional Family. Conceived in these terms it is not unreasonable to add a more diverse set of films to the more restricted group mentioned above. These additions might include *Familia* (1996), *Cascabel* (Daniel Cebrián, 2000), *El otro barrio* (García Ruiz, 2000), *Dones* (Judith Colell, 2000), *Carlos contra el mundo* (Carabante, 2002), *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* (Daniela Fejerman and Inés París, 2002), *Smoking Room* (Julio Wallowits and Roger Gual, 2002), *En la ciudad* (Cesc Gay, 2003), *Cachorro* (2004), and a number of films, including *Saïd* (Llorenç Soler, 1999) and *Ilegal* (Ignacio Vilar, 2003), now often grouped together as “immigration cinema”.<sup>147</sup>

Although shared qualities exist between them there has also been an arguably unhelpful and often misleading tendency to unproblematically conflate *cine social* with realist cinematic movements and moments outside Spain and, in particular to translate it as “social realism”.<sup>148</sup> Hallam and Marshment describe social realism as a discursive term used to identify “films that aim to show the effects of environmental factors on the development of character through depictions that emphasise the relationship between location and identity”. They also note that in the British context such films have tended to be characterised by episodic narrative structures and “an observational style of camerawork that emphasises situations and events”.<sup>149</sup> Although environment and location are central to many of the *cine social* films, their directors give equal if not greater importance to interior, intimate landscapes and the emotional journeys undertaken by their characters. Likewise, although there are some stylistic

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<sup>147</sup> See Ballesteros (2005) and (2006), and Van Liew (2008: 259-262).

<sup>148</sup> For example Begin confusingly describes *cine social* as “the film genre formally known as social realism” (2008: 262), while Faulkner defines *Solas* as “an example of social realist cinema, which came to be known in the 1990s as *cine social*” (2007: 238).

<sup>149</sup> Hallam and Marshment (2000: 184).

similarities in terms of camerawork the emphasis in *cine social* texts tends to remain on the affective life of the characters, who also drive the narrative. The association of *cine social* with social realism can also be problematic because the latter is often seen in opposition to popular cinema. However, as the eclectic group of films outlined above suggests, *cine social* can be very varied in tone and often makes use of multiple generic elements, including popular modes of representation and address. For example, even films like *Solas* that do conform to Smith's description of *cine social* as "sober in tone and modest in form",<sup>150</sup> blend this sobriety with a melodramatic sensibility. This is a combination that, as noted below, has been much maligned by some.

Amongst the steadily growing body of scholarship on the group of films under consideration in this thesis it is possible to discern two major critical currents. On the one hand, there are those studies drawn upon throughout the following chapters that have concentrated on analysing aspects of the cultural representations offered by these films.<sup>151</sup> On the other hand, coming predominantly from the group of academics and critics based in Spain who were mentioned in the previous subsection, there has been a questioning of the validity and/or representativeness of these films/*cine social*. Roberto Cueto has accused *Te doy mis ojos*, amongst other films, of what he calls *sobreverbalización*. Comparing these films to sitcoms or *culebrones*, he scathingly

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<sup>150</sup> Smith (2003: 38).

<sup>151</sup> In relation to *Solas* Gámez Fuentes (2001b: 73-75), Cruz (2002: 104-105), Dapena (2002), Donapetry (2004: 384-394), Leonard (2004) and Zecchi (2005: 147-148), have all written on questions of gender, while del Pino (2003) and Faulkner (2007) have considered regional, national and European identities. Cruz (2004) has looked at gender and violence in *Te doy*, while Zecchi (2006: 196-198), has considered the male body. Homosexuality and the male body form the focus of rare work on *Cachorro* by Fouz-Hernández and Martínez-Expósito (2007: 128-134). Santaolalla (2005: 142-145), Berger (2007) and García-Alvite (2007) have all looked at representations of the racial and ethnic other in *Poniente*. *Flores* has attracted the largest body of critical analysis. Martín-Cabrera (2002), Santaolalla (2004) and (2005: 192-204) and Van Liew (2008: 266-273), have dealt with race and ethnicity, while Martín Márquez (2002), Ballesteros (2005), Kim (2005: 173-189), Masterson (2007) and Song (2008: 47-56), with gender, race and ethnicity.

argues that *cine social* is the ideal accompaniment to “[las] tediosas sesiones de planchado”.<sup>152</sup> In a similar vein Núria Vidal dismisses what she considers to be the “conciencia progresista” of Bollaín’s and León de Aranoa’s films, arguing that they are more “*telemovies* de denuncia que [...] auténticas películas de cine”.<sup>153</sup> Sergi Sánchez derisively refers to what he deems the “falso realismo” and “eficaz didactismo” of Bollaín’s work, while Carlos Losilla sees *Solas* as being guilty of moving from (laudable) “realismo intimista” to (contemptible) “melodrama casi folletinesco” and “parábola moral”.<sup>154</sup> Francisco Marinero argues that *Cachorro* may have excellent intentions but criticises the film on the basis that he considers it to be “un melodrama previsible” that suffers from “excesos sentimentales”.<sup>155</sup> Marta Sanz has also criticised *cine social* for what she describes as “la pequeña catarsis de una lágrima que puede ser el resultado de ciertas caídas en el melodrama o en el efectismo de una ternura propia del llamado sentimentalismo de izquierdas”.<sup>156</sup> However, it is scholar Ángel Quintana who has perhaps been most unrelentingly negative in his work on these texts, lamenting what he terms as the “realismo tímido” and “historias cerradas” of a group of films, in which he includes *Flores de otro mundo*, *Solas*, *Te doy mis ojos* and *Poniente*.<sup>157</sup>

These criticisms seem to revolve around an aversion to the way in which *cine social* mixes realist modes of representation with more generic or popular elements (‘bad’ cinema), or an ingrained distrust, as discussed above, of the generic *per se*.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Cueto (2006: 32).

<sup>153</sup> Vidal (2006: 185).

<sup>154</sup> Sánchez (1999) [accessed 9.9.08] and Losilla (1999) [accessed 10.11.08].

<sup>155</sup> Marinero (2004) [accessed 4.9.08].

<sup>156</sup> Sanz (2006: 106).

<sup>157</sup> Quintana (2006: 279-283). See also Quintana (2001), (2005) and (2008b).

<sup>158</sup> The basis of these criticisms also echoes the condemnations of Eloy de la Iglesia’s work mentioned on pages 41-42.

Moreover, they demonstrate a frustration that the small group of films generally classified as *cine social*, celebrated with prizes both at home and abroad on the international film festival circuit, should be considered more representative of cinema made in Spain than more formally innovative projects ('good' cinema).<sup>159</sup> Several of the scholars mentioned above argue that more novel or open filmic engagements with 'realities' can be found in films made in Spain's geographical peripheries (especially Andalusia, Catalunya, Galicia and Euskadi) and on "las periferias de lo políticamente correcto".<sup>160</sup> Vidal gives *Solas*, *El otro barrio* (Salvador García Ruiz, 2000), *Lena* (Tapia, 2001), *Astronautas* (Santi Amodeo, 2003), and *Frágil* (Bajo Ulloa, 2004) as examples of such films, while Quintana and Losilla both champion the approach to filmmaking pioneered by Joaquim Jordà and taught through "El Máster en Documental de Creación" at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona as exemplary in its disruption of realist conventions.<sup>161</sup>

The confusing, contradictory and, at times, disparaging use of the term *cine social* is perhaps indicative of the fact that it has always been more of a critical label than a fixed set of formal conventions or a coherent political or artistic movement. However, despite, or perhaps because of all the historical and critical baggage that comes with it, *cine social* continues to be a helpful concept provided that definitions of it, like those of genre suggested above, remain flexible. In this thesis, it is used as an umbrella term to refer to a group of films that are eclectic in their mood and tone and combine multiple modes of representation, but are all set in contemporary Spain and engage critically, to varying extents, with an array of pressing social issues. These

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<sup>159</sup> See the Primary Filmography for details of prizes and film festival participation.

<sup>160</sup> Vidal (2006: 185).

<sup>161</sup> See Losilla (2005) and Quintana (2005) and (2006). Vidal (2006) also pits Madrid against Barcelona comparing *El bola* (Achéro Mañas, 2000) with *De nens* (Joaquín Jordà, 2003) and *Flores de otro mundo* with *En construcción* (José Luis Guerín, 2001).

include broad themes such as gender relations, children's and workers' rights, sexual orientations, race and ethnicity, addiction and social dysfunction and/or the more specific issues of, amongst others, sexism, domestic violence, poor working conditions, unemployment, homophobia, immigration, xenophobia, alcoholism, drug dependency, squalid housing conditions, loneliness, juvenile delinquency and family breakdown. Of key importance is that *cine social* usually brings previously marginalised or hidden issues centre screen. In doing so *cine social* often questions established social structures and institutions, norms and attitudes, while also creatively imagining how these might be (re)negotiated for a new generation of Spaniards. These challenges tend to be presented through intimate stories that follow the emotional journeys of individuals; carefully thought-out characters who are meticulously developed during the course of the film, thereby engaging the spectator and encouraging or provoking them to form opinions of the society that surrounds them.

Although, as mentioned above, these films do not always adhere to a fixed set of conventions, they do, nevertheless, have certain features in common. For example, they tend to employ a high degree of surface realism in their representation of settings, including lots of on location shooting. Similarly the cast is usually composed of unknown, little-known or character actors such as José Luis García Pérez (Pedro in *Cachorro*) or María Galiana (Rosa in *Solas*) who epitomise the Spanish *fulano/a de tal*. This mundane quality is also emulated in the films' linear time structures that echo the rhythm of everyday life. Each of the filmmakers who have been associated with *cine social* tends to have their own personal social and, to some extent, political agenda: and although they could be deemed to be broadly liberal or left-wing, they do not belong to a specific political group or movement. Only towards the end of 2003

and the beginning of 2004, after Aznar's controversial commitment to the Iraq War and when it seemed a foregone conclusion that the PP would win a third term, did a group of thirty two filmmakers come together to create the explicitly anti-PP film *¡Hay motivo!* (2004).<sup>162</sup> So, although Seguin rightly points out that “este apego cada vez más intenso a la realidad llega en un momento políticamente *significativo*: el gobierno cada vez más autoritario del Partido (Im)Popular de José María Aznar”, *cine social* would not, at least to begin with, seem to be a direct reaction against this.<sup>163</sup>

Returning to Quintana's criticisms one could argue that they tell us much more about what Beck and Rodríguez Ortega have called the “historically tempestuous” relationship between genre and auteurism in Spanish film scholarship, than anything about the films themselves.<sup>164</sup> The example of Eloy de la Iglesia is particularly pertinent here as Smith, drawing on Hopewell, proposes that critical abuse of this director's work from the nineteen seventies and early eighties stems from “an inability to read his use of genre”. He adds that the rough surfaces of the director's films are mistaken for neorealism, and that the films are subsequently criticized for not fulfilling criteria “that they do not themselves recognize”.<sup>165</sup> Writing rare contemporary commentaries in support of de la Iglesia in the radical film journal *Contracampo* (1978-1987) José Luis Téllez argues that instead of bemoaning what he chooses to do, it is more useful to analyse how he does it, while Javier Vega notes that

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<sup>162</sup> See elpais.com (2004) [accessed 3.3.09]. Bollaín and Gutiérrez both directed segments of the film. Shown via Localia Televisión (2000-2009), a network of regional channels that were part of the left-wing media conglomerate PRISA, and made available online just before the March 2004 elections *¡Hay motivo!* was intended to “abrir los ojos a los ciudadanos y mostrar algunos problemas que el ejecutivo de los últimos años desatendió, manipuló, obvió o directamente escamoteó a la opinión pública”, see Vidal (2006: 184), quoting the *¡Hay motivo!* Pressbook.

<sup>163</sup> Seguin (2007: 64).

<sup>164</sup> Beck and Rodríguez Ortega (2008: 5).

<sup>165</sup> Smith (1992: 133).

his use of “popular” modes of representation as a vehicle for his political message confronts the spectator with a discourse that compels them to take sides.<sup>166</sup>

Dismissing the group of films under consideration here on similar grounds would be to over-simplify both the complex and shifting nature of ideology and to underestimate the spectator’s capacity for self-reflective activity. Consequently, rather than embark on an irrelevant attempt to elevate the group of films under consideration here to the worthy status of ‘good’ or ‘high’ culture, it seems more interesting and useful to build on the previous discussion of genre and modes. I propose that to read these films as “timid” or “failed” realist texts is to mistake their surface naturalism and social commitment for realism, when this is just one of a range of expressive modes they employ. As will be outlined in the following subsection, the films’ use of affect and melodramatic elements, typical of *cine social*, could be read not as a corruption of realism, but as powerful representational and political strategies in their own right. Moreover, since it is possible to detect a melodramatic sensibility at work in the films of many Spanish directors at the turn of the twenty-first century, we neglect or denigrate it at the risk of misunderstanding the period.

#### **0.4.3 (Re)viewing Melodrama and Emotion**

As Triana Toribio has pointed out, since 1975 some genres have been deemed to be “unsuitable tools in the settling of accounts that was the responsibility of a democratic national cinema”, adding that “comedy and melodrama were notable casualties”.<sup>167</sup> Yet arguably, it is precisely these two modes, especially the latter, that are fundamental to the progressive political project of the films under consideration here. Jackie Byars maintains that societies have to find “nonviolent” means of dealing

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<sup>166</sup> Téllez (2007: 160) and Vega (2007: 163).

<sup>167</sup> Triana Toribio (2003: 129).



with internal social conflicts and contradictions, and suggests that the melodramatic mode provides a “locus and strategy for negotiation [...] a site for struggles over deeply disturbing materials and fundamental values”.<sup>168</sup> Melodrama has been scorned for its perceived displacement of the political by the personal. However, Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook and Christine Gledhill have persuasively countered that “melodrama produces the body and the interpersonal domain”, for example, the family, “as the sites in which the socio-political stakes its struggles”.<sup>169</sup> Moreover, writing on French cinema’s urgent return to politics and the real, O’Shaughnessy has argued that “updated” melodrama “can have a genuine purchase on the social”.<sup>170</sup>

In the context of Spanish cinema it could be argued that many *cine social* films constitute examples of just such updated melodrama.<sup>171</sup> Crucial here is to understand how the melodramatic mode “draws other modes into its processes of articulation”.<sup>172</sup> As Gledhill explains, “melodrama thrives on comic counterpoint, can site fateful encounters in romance, and keeps pace with the most recent of modes, realism, which first worked in cooperation with melodrama and then disowned it”.<sup>173</sup> That is to say, that in order to remain aesthetically and ethically relevant melodrama works in constant dialogue with realism in two ways. Firstly, it employs those filmic conventions that, at a given historical moment, look like realism. Secondly, it draws on realism by adjusting to the shifting signs of what Neale calls “cultural verisimilitude”, that is, the contemporary public opinion on or awareness of cultural

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<sup>168</sup> Byars (1991: 11).

<sup>169</sup> Bratton, Cook and Gledhill (1994: 1).

<sup>170</sup> O’Shaughnessy (2003: 200).

<sup>171</sup> This is not to suggest that this is the only form that “updated melodrama” takes, another example could be what Belén Vidal calls Isabel Coixet’s own brand of ‘cool’ or ‘indie’ melodramas, see Vidal (2008).

<sup>172</sup> Gledhill (2000: 229).

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

and social issues.<sup>174</sup> On first viewing these films there may appear to be little evidence of the excess of style associated with melodrama precisely because they maintain this close relationship with realism. They all employ a predominantly naturalistic *mise-en-scène*, were shot almost entirely on location and use a mixture of little-known and non-professional actors. However, on closer inspection it is possible to discern the directors' careful melodramatic use of *mise-en-scène* and sound at significant moments, to heighten emotional impact or express repressed desire. On those occasions where the films have been accused of displaying "excess sentimentality", I propose that their critical potential actually resides precisely in this non-ironic use of affect.

Noël Carroll has noted that emotions profoundly underwrite our experience of most films, especially popular movies, and yet it is something that filmic analysis tends to overlook or at least to under-analyse.<sup>175</sup> This is due in part to the Brechtian tradition within film studies, which assumes that emotive narratives can only serve to deaden rational capacities, draining us of energy that might otherwise have transformed the world. However, a number of film scholars who study emotion in relation to cognition, argue that emotions should not be considered as opposed or detrimental to intellect and judgement because both form an integral part of our cognitive processes.<sup>176</sup>

Cognitive psychology is concerned with unexceptional, everyday behaviour and phenomena, and examines, amongst other aspects, the relationship between multiple external/sensory stimuli and the internal processes by which this information is organised according to learnt/established structures or schemata. This method

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<sup>174</sup> Neale (1990: 47).

<sup>175</sup> Carroll (1999: 23).

<sup>176</sup> See Bordwell (1985) and (1989), Carroll (1999), Grodal (1997), Smith, M (2004) and Tan (1996).

places greater emphasis on the relationship between form/content than purely formal/textual theories. As Hallam and Marshment note, cognitive psychology as applied to film studies “is a theory of psychological engagement with the text that emphasises familiarity and recognition – it maintains that viewers engage with narrative films in ways similar to those in which they engage with everyday experience”.<sup>177</sup> They add that the spectator engages with the film text by piecing together the informational cues given, thereby creating meaning(s) for themselves in an interactive process.<sup>178</sup> Consequently, cognitive approaches are useful as they help us to understand how films may be working *upon* us, including how they may encourage us to adopt or ally ourselves with certain meanings (ideologies).

According to cognitivists, when we respond to fictional works we begin with our own experience of the world, and existing conceptual frameworks consisting of beliefs and values shaped by the social and cultural structures in which we are immersed. Yet the cognitive approach also considers the possibility of expanding and adapting existing conceptual frameworks or schemata (in this case, The Traditional Family) through new experiences, including experiences of fictional texts. By proposing alternative histories, moral codes, and social rituals, these new experiences may encourage the spectator to revise their assumptions, beliefs, and values that are brought to them.<sup>179</sup> Through its affective mode of address, therefore, melodrama may foster greater clarity of the historical moment in the spectator including “the kinds of problems we have to deal with, and the means we have for undertaking their imaginative ‘solution’”.<sup>180</sup> Yet, as Greg M. Smith points out, although texts may offer

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<sup>177</sup> Hallam and Marshment (2000: 125).

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>179</sup> Smith, M. (2004: 52-54).

<sup>180</sup> Brooks (1995: 206).

“invitations to feel” individual viewers can choose to accept or reject these invitations.<sup>181</sup>

So, on the basis that the faculties of cognition and judgment are brought into play in the process of eliciting an emotional response to film, some of the ways that movies effectively and affectively engage and position the spectator can be identified. These include what Murray Smith terms the three levels of imaginative engagement with characters (recognition, alignment and allegiance) that combine to create “structures of sympathy”.<sup>182</sup> Hallam and Marshment’s refinement of Smith’s approach expands this notion of imaginative engagement to include other potential stimuli ranging from facial gestures to music or the positioning of the camera. Also useful is their insistence that the broad term “alignment” should, where it is helpful to do so, be further clarified to indicate whether it is intellectual, concern, moral or emotional alignment that is being elicited.<sup>183</sup> In order to understand the films’ ideological underpinnings and how they might be working to position the spectator in relation to existing and new notions of family I examine the way in which the filmmakers’ use “critical prefocusing”, Carroll’s term to describe the foregrounding of certain aspects of the narrative likely to elicit an emotional reaction from the audience, and the allied construction of “pro attitudes” towards certain/preferred characters, plot developments or outcomes.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Smith, G.M. (2003: 172).

<sup>182</sup> Smith, M. (2004: 81-86).

<sup>183</sup> Hallam and Marshment (2000: 134-141).

<sup>184</sup> Carroll (2008), 149-191.

## CHAPTER ONE

### HUMOUR AND HORROR: PERFORMING THE TRADITIONAL FAMILY IN FERNANDO LEÓN DE ARANO A'S *FAMILIA* (1996)

y como siempre ha sido  
lo que más ha alegrado y divertido  
la representación bien aplaudida,  
y es representación la humana vida,  
una comedia sea  
la que hoy el cielo en tu teatro vea.

Pedro Calderón de la Barca. *El gran teatro del mundo* (1655), 43-48<sup>185</sup>

“Si sólo es fingir un poco, tampoco es tan difícil, lo hace todo el mundo ¿No?”

Ventura en *Familia*

#### 1.1 Introduction

*Familia* is a film that centres around what, at first, seems to be the epitome of an average upper middle-class family on the day of the man of house's fifty-fifth birthday. However, the initial familiar bustle and arguments of the opening credit sequence and first scene at the birthday breakfast table is shattered when patriarch Santiago (Juan Luis Galiardo), upset that his youngest son Nico (Aníbal Carbonero) has given him a pipe when he does not smoke, sets about lambasting the boy. After calling him an idiot and complaining that he did not want a fat child with glasses, he tells Nico that he is fired and storms out. Through the dialogue of those who remain, it soon becomes apparent that what, just moments before, had seemed thoroughly convincing family is in fact a theatre troupe hired to act as Santiago's family for the

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<sup>185</sup> See also lines 427-428 and 949-954. 1655 refers to the year *El gran teatro del mundo* was first published, Allen and Ynduráin (1997) give 1649 as the year it was probably first performed (1997: xxiii).

day. After this initial setback, Nico manages to win Santiago round and the performance of family life carries on as if nothing had happened, as it so often does after domestic disputes. Santiago's 'wife' Carmen (Amparo Muñoz), 'mother' Rosa (Raquel Rodrigo), older 'son' Carlos (Juan Querol), and 'daughter' Luna (Elena Anaya) are soon joined by his 'brother' Ventura (Chete Lera) and 'sister-in-law' Sole (Ágata Lys), who come to take part in the day's festivities. They eat together, sleep siesta and while away a lazy afternoon, which is only interrupted by the arrival of Alicia (Béatrice Camurat), a 'stranger' who is left stranded just outside the house when her car gets a flat tyre. After admiring Santiago's family, she accepts an invitation to stay for his birthday barbecue. However, she gets a shock when after a pleasant conversation with Santiago he suddenly declares his love for her and says they should tell Carmen. She flees to the bathroom only to find Ventura and Carmen having sex in the kitchen. Despite the confusion Alicia remains with the family and is still there late in the evening when Rosa is found dead in the garden. As 'the family' sit around her body, laid out on the dining room table, Alicia feels compelled to confess to them that she is an actress, only to find out in her turn that this family is also just an act.

Made in 1996 *Familia* was León de Aranoa's directorial debut, which was largely made possible through the support he received from veteran producer Elías Querejeta. Perhaps best known for his work with dissident director Carlos Saura during the late sixties and seventies, Querejeta had been impressed by León de Aranoa's short *Sirenas* (1994). Picking up on this connection with Saura, Heredero has suggested that one can discern in *Familia* "los ecos del cine metafórico más representativo de la transición política (una especie cultivada mayoritariamente por la factoría Querejeta), del que rescata no sólo la doble lectura que encierra, sino también

la presencia de los fantasmas familiares, tan habituales en aquella formulación”.<sup>186</sup>

These aspects of the obliquely critical and highly metaphorical auteur cinema associated with Saura and other dissident directors certainly do seem to resonate in *Familia*. However, while in Saura’s work families tend to act as a metaphor for the wider social context and political situation, in León de Aranoa’s film the critical focus remains firmly on The Traditional Family itself.

*Familia* was released in January 1997, a year when box office takings from Spanish cinema were dominated by commercially successful genre films like the comedies *Airbag* (Bajo Ulloa, 1997) and *El amor perjudica seriamente la salud* (Manuel Gómez Pereira), and the thrillers *Carne trémula* (Almodóvar, 1997), *Tesis* (Amenábar, 1996) and *Abre los ojos* (Amenábar, 1997), but were also boosted by the family-centred psychological dramas *La buena estrella* (Ricardo Franco, 1997) and *Martín (Hache)* (Aristarain, 1997).<sup>187</sup> In this context, *Familia* was a moderate critical and popular success, despite, or perhaps because of its blurring of different modes of representation, use of little-known actors and more modest production values.<sup>188</sup> Like Bollain’s debut two years earlier with *Hola, ¿estás sola?* (1995) and Zambrano’s two years later with *Solas* (1999), León de Aranoa’s *Familia* was lauded for its freshness. The director’s follow-up feature *Barrio* (1998) was the first of the group of Spanish films that prompted a revival of the term *cine social*. However, the manner in which *Familia* dissects the roles, narratives and values associated with The Traditional Family constitutes a critical engagement with social structures that, as discussed in the

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<sup>186</sup> Heredero (1999: 223).

<sup>187</sup> These films all featured in amongst the top ten Spanish film earners in 1997. The viewing and box office figures recorded by the MCU ranged from 2,195,715 spectators and 7,205,891.99 euros for the top grossing film *Airbag*, and 576,269 spectators and 2,084,174.20 euros for *Martín (Hache)* in tenth place.

<sup>188</sup> The figures given for *Familia* on the MCU database estimate that the film attracted 151,333 spectators and took 545,500.56 euros. See Primary Filmography for details of awards won.

introduction to this thesis, lies at the heart of *cine social*. The theme of unravelling the lie of the family, or the family built on lies is also the plot motor of several other films being produced around this time, for example, such as the dramas *Adosados* (Camus, 1996), *La vida de nadie* (Eduard Cortés, 2002) and *En la ciudad sin límites* (2002). However, the crucial difference between these films and *Familia* is not just that the latter constantly shifts between the dramatic and the comic, but also that it overtly places The (Traditional) Family, rather than a family, at the centre of its narrative.

Alfred Hitchcock famously remarked that cinema is “life with the boring bits cut out”.<sup>189</sup> But in *Familia* it is precisely these “boring bits” that León de Aranoa recuperates for cinema. On the one hand, León de Aranoa teases out and analyses the dramatic and comical elements of everyday routines and the rituals of family life. The film’s non-diegetic music, the playful jazz of Django Reinhardt and Stéphane Grappelli, is often juxtaposed with disconcerting situations, showing how closely the comical and the potentially troubling coexist in the everyday. On the other hand, he deconstructs this *comedia* of the mundane by rendering its continuous (re)production and (re)presentation visible, thereby revealing the intrinsically performative quality of a social institution that is usually deemed to be entirely natural.

Through metadrama the film exploits the boundaries between reality and fiction as a means of stressing the humour and horror inherent in the daily lives and underlying power dynamics of The Traditional Family. Jonathan Thacker and Melveena McKendrick’s observations on role-play and metatheatre in the *comedias* of Golden Age playwrights would seem to demonstrate that this preoccupation has a

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<sup>189</sup> Maltby (2003: 429), quoting Hitchcock.



long history in Spain and beyond.<sup>190</sup> According to McKendrick, the *comedia* is “fascinated, in both serious and light-hearted plays, by the relationship between reality and pretence or illusion and therefore with role-play, assumed identities and plays within plays”.<sup>191</sup> Meanwhile, Thacker argues that metatheatre can be used to reveal the constructed nature of social life, by exploring the effects of characters’ “self-dramatization”. He also claims that “the conventions of drama are related to the conventions of social life” because “real” society is “theatrical”.<sup>192</sup>

*Familia* breaks the illusion near the beginning, and yet the role-playing is upheld almost to the end. Indeed, viewers may find themselves forgetting that the family on screen has already been revealed as a fiction, even though reminders continually punctuate the film. The self-conscious performance of family roles and the unfolding of believable, mundane family dramas develop side by side. The viewer’s complicity in the characters’ self-conscious performance draws us into the narrative while simultaneously encouraging us to reflect on familial identity. As Heredero suggests, *Familia* plays with the idea of “la familia como teatro y como representación [...] como mentira y como verdad; en definitiva, como aparece y funciona entre todos nosotros; es decir, como realidad que hay que soportar y como ficción necesaria, o quizás al revés”.<sup>193</sup> As this chapter demonstrates, *Familia* is an incisive illustration both of the power of The Traditional Family to convince and of the effectiveness of metadrama in undermining the automatised nature of this conviction.

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<sup>190</sup> The relationship between theatre and life, as explored through various configurations of the *theatrum mundi* topos, stretches through Western cultures back to classical Greece, see Christian (1987: vii-xix).

<sup>191</sup> McKendrick (2000: 76).

<sup>192</sup> Thacker (2002: 18).

<sup>193</sup> Heredero (1999: 222).

## 1.2 Staging The Family: Performing Roles, Routines and Rituals

John Gillis has suggested that we all have two families, “the one we live *with* and another we live *by*”.<sup>194</sup> We might like the two to be the same, but they are not. The former is lived experience of family, while the latter equates to The Traditional Family and is articulated through myths, rituals, stories and images; and according to Gillis, it can never be allowed to let us down. Gillis’s ‘two family’ notion implies that it is always possible to distinguish neatly between lived reality and ideology. *Familia* sets up an extreme example of how these two families are only divided by what Richard Schechner has described as “the very porous membrane separating the ‘real’ from the ‘staged’”.<sup>195</sup> This section starts by considering how *Familia* establishes domestic space as a literal, metaphorical and sometimes uncanny stage where family/The Traditional Family is (re)presented. It then goes on to examine how the film persistently denaturalises The Traditional Family by emphasising the performative and/or theatrical dimensions of family roles, routines and rituals.

The knowledge that the characters are engaged in a self-conscious performance within a performance, gleaned from the conversation that follows Santiago’s criticism of Nico at the breakfast table, forces the spectator to (re)evaluate the (re)presentation of domestic space in *Familia*. Prior to the breakfast table revelation, the film’s opening sequence introduces the *chalé* using a series of dissolve-linked establishing shots that gradually move us from the street outside to a bedroom, an inner sanctum of the home, where a man appears just to have awoken. The dissolves make the physical barriers, the bricks and mortar that divide public and

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<sup>194</sup> Gillis (1996: xv).

<sup>195</sup> Schechner (2002: 111).

private space, melt away, thereby giving us privileged access, as so many films do, to intimate spaces where the characters' stories will be acted out.

While easily identifiable from the outside as a house, a number of elements have to work together to code the *chalé* as a home: the preceding family photograph of the credit sequence, and the subsequent witnessing of mundane moments (the man lying in bed waiting for his alarm clock to go off) and everyday routines and rituals (a group of males and females of varying ages getting dressed, putting on make up, preparing and eating breakfast). These elements, together with the spectator's own lived experiences, not only code this house as a home but also these people as a family. That is to say that, in the social or popular imaginary, home and family are intrinsically connected and mutually constitutive. Conventionally, a house comes to signify home when inhabited by a family, and home, with its connotations of shelter, privacy and intimacy frames family both physically and psychologically. This notion is echoed visually as the actors repeatedly appear framed by the house's doorways, arches, hallways, banisters, curtains, mirrors and windows. Throughout the film these function as playful evocations of the theatrical proscenium arch, a framing device that is only made explicit when Santiago delivers his appraisal of the actors' performance near the end [Still 1].

The large, detached *chalé* with a garden and a swimming pool located on a suburban street implies from the outset that its occupants are likely to be an economically successful, middle-class (heterosexual, white) Family. This setting, along with possessions featured in the film like Ventura's recently acquired 'family car', evokes a social status commonly (re)presented as aspirational. Such assumptions are initially confirmed when the spectator is presented with the well-turned-out, model family within. However, despite of the desirability-factor and the idyllic diegetic

soundtrack of gentle birdsong that accompanies the opening sequence, there is, nevertheless, something slightly disquieting, or *unheimlich* (uncanny, or literally ‘unhomely’), about the house. Freud discusses the uncanny as a complex term that simultaneously eludes and invites definition, as that which arouses dread and horror or excites fear, but that also contains within in it the *heimlich*, the homely or familiar.<sup>196</sup> In *Familia* this sense of the uncanny may reside in the fact that in Spain, where the majority of people live in *pisos* in the city or *casas* in the villages, *chalés* in the suburbs were and remain relatively unusual. As such, local audiences may associate this type of dwelling more with the large bourgeois houses used as settings for Hollywood and European melodramas and thrillers. Spectators may be reminded of the big (and often old) houses in classics like Douglas Sirk’s *All That Heaven Allows* (1955: USA), Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960: USA), Luis Buñuel’s *El ángel exterminador* (1962: Mexico), Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s *Sleuth* (1972: UK) or Saura’s *Ana y los lobos* (1974), houses that threaten to entrap, that mask unhappiness and harbour dark family secrets. The static long shot of the house in the opening sequence of *Familia*, which is repeated at regular intervals during the film to show the passing of the day, may bring to mind the attractive, aspirational images of domestic luxury and conspicuous consumption typical of estate agent’s brochures, or lavish, lighthearted Hollywood productions and their Spanish counterparts. However, the house, and the spectator’s expectations of what might take place there, are simultaneously tainted by association with the kind of films mentioned above.

Thus, prior viewing experiences are likely to feed the imagination and intensify unease about the unfolding events and the characters’ motivations. Significantly, in speculating about Santiago’s story, his motives and assumed lack of

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<sup>196</sup> See Freud (1995: 219-226).

family, Carlos looks to the sensational and melodramatic plot twists for a possible explanation:

- Carlos: A lo mejor es que tuvo una hostia en coche o algo así, se mató a toda su familia y por eso hace esto. O a lo mejor fue un accidente aéreo hace muchos años y desde entonces monta siempre esta movida el día de su cumpleaños como homenaje o yo qué sé.
- Carmen: Tú has visto muchas películas.
- Luna: ¿Por qué no? Podría ser ¿no?
- Carlos: O los mató él, te imaginas, y están enterrados en el jardín.

This last hypothesis gives a menacing edge to the commonplace images of Santiago clearing leaves from the murky swimming pool that are shown during this sequence. The members of the troupe sit in the living room, looking out onto the garden so that the window briefly frames Santiago. He momentarily becomes the watched rather than the watcher, as León de Aranoa seems to explore how cinematic experiences have come to form part of what is imaginable.

However, after the first shot of the house any initial suspicions the spectator may have had are likely to be swept away with a cut to the routine bustle of the characters getting ready, accompanied by an upbeat non-diegetic jazz number by Reinhardt and Grappelli aptly entitled “Pent-Up House”. The ensuing sense of equilibrium or normality is, of course, broken again moments later at the breakfast table, thereby reintroducing the uncanny. Repeated throughout, this alternating pattern ensures that the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich* co-reside on screen and in the spectator’s mind. At several points members of the troupe make remarks that seem to speak to the tension that exists between the two. For example, Carmen’s comment about the lack of the kind of personal effects that make a place feel homely (Por aquí no se ve ni una foto ni nada), lead them to wonder if it is actually Santiago’s home or whether it has

just been rented for the occasion. This conjecture that the house might be a rented stage has the uncanny effect of recasting the familiar signifiers of domesticity, such as tables, chairs, sofas, crockery, paintings, lamps, and so on, as theatrical props; consequently their meaning is simultaneously retained and destabilised. The supposition that it might be Santiago's house, but that he lives there alone, prompts additional speculation amongst the characters that reveals further assumptions that typically surround family and private space. Perhaps most interesting is their blatant discomfort at the idea that someone would own such a large house and not fill it with a family, as though society cannot justify or imagine the former without the presence of the latter. These various and often contradictory elements ensure that the house ultimately eludes the fulfilment of the socially expected 'comfortable sanctuary' definition, making it serve instead as a constantly shifting psychological frame for *The Family*.

Although homes have traditionally been coded as private spaces, those of the upper and middle-classes have, nevertheless, always contained rooms where families have received and entertained extended family and friends. Looking back to Golden Age Spain, Alicia Cámara Muñoz stresses the importance of the spaces where guests were received in a nobleman's home. She notes that the *sala* or *salas*, *oratorio*, *patio* and/or *jardín* functioned as private/public indicators of the social status the house's occupants aspired to on the basis that "los ojos de los visitantes son los que devuelven la imagen que la familia quiere proyectar de sí misma en la sociedad".<sup>197</sup> Writing on bourgeois homes in nineteenth century Spain, Carmen Giménez Serrano argues that members of this up and coming class were willing to sacrifice much to have "un gran salón [...] ese espacio teatral que emparenta a la nueva sociedad con la antigua en el

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<sup>197</sup> Cámara Muñoz (2006: 175).

marco de una comunidad ritual”.<sup>198</sup> Sofia Diéguez Patao maintains that during the twentieth century, homes in Spain have become increasingly private spaces of self-expression, with the more family-orientated and multipurpose *sala de estar* (or *salón-comedor* in new housing developments) replacing the grander bourgeois *salón* as the “[espacio] de encuentro y reunión”. She adds that as a space where family photographs and prized-possessions tend to be displayed this continues to be “un lugar de representación”, that is, a place where the family recreate their roles.<sup>199</sup>

Extrapolating from the notion that the more “public” living and dining rooms possess an “on stage” feel, it could be argued that bathrooms, kitchens and bedrooms can be perceived as “backstage” spaces. These are the terms used by sociologist Erving Goffman in his seminal work *The Representation of Self in Everyday Life*.<sup>200</sup> In his study he discusses how individuals behave differently depending on whether they are, or perceive themselves to be located in a “front” or “back” region. The former refers to a space-time setting where/when particular performances are given and certain social and moral standards must be maintained, while the latter is defined relative to such performances. According to Goffman a back region is a place where “illusions and impressions are openly constructed”, where props and costumes are stored, adjusted or used differently away from an audience, and where a performer can relax, “drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character”.<sup>201</sup> The home in general, and bathrooms and bedrooms in particular, tend to be imagined as just such a backstage space where family members can unwind, drop any pretence, persona or role they may adopt in the public sphere and just ‘be themselves’.

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<sup>198</sup> Giménez Serrano (2006: 32).

<sup>199</sup> Diéguez Patao (2006: 140).

<sup>200</sup> Goffman (1969: 92-98).

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 97-98.

However, *Familia* and its ‘man hires group of actors to be his family for the day’ premise, disrupts this neat division and subverts the notion that individuals simply ‘act naturally’ within the private sphere and The Traditional Family. Whenever Santiago is out of view the other characters act as though they were ‘backstage’; any room he is present in is necessarily transformed into a stage where the troupe have to be ‘in character’ in order to perform their designated role. It is as though Santiago is not just the troupe’s spectator/customer, but that he also functions as a walking ‘fourth wall’ in the theatre of home.

Spaces that do remain consistently ‘backstage’ or ‘behind-the-scenes’ in *Familia* are the bathrooms of the house. They are presented as inbetween or transitional spaces where moments of preparation, clarification and/or reflection take place; where “one can detect a wonderful putting on and taking off of character”.<sup>202</sup> Indeed, with their large mirrors and bright lighting the bathrooms are reminiscent of theatre dressing rooms. This possible reading is supported by the phrases (“Menos diez” and “Último aviso”), phrases typically delivered by theatre runners, that Rosa uses as she stands outside one of the bathrooms waiting her turn. It is in a bathroom that Carmen is first introduced as she applies her make-up and fixes her hair. However, once the metadrama has been revealed these moments invite a re-reading. Seen through the film’s metadramatic lens Carmen’s actions, a taken-for-granted aspect of many women’s daily routine, can be reimagined as part of the physical and psychological process of getting into character deemed necessary for performing the roles of Wife, Mother, Sister, Daughter-in-law and Woman.

Each member of the theatre troupe in *Familia* has a character, or more precisely a role to play within The Traditional Family: Husband, Father, Wife,

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 105.



(Grand)mother, (Grand)daughter, (Grand)son, Brother, Sister, Aunt, Uncle, Niece, Nephew, Brother-in-law and Sister-in-law. It is implied that Santiago, the embodiment of a patriarchal social system, has stipulated that these roles must be fulfilled and has therefore provided the actors with scripts and a family history that he expects them to have learnt by heart. However, their performances also seem to rely on both their and the spectator's experiences of internalised social norms, that is, naturalised role expectations, responsibilities and hierarchies according to age and gender. In their discussion of The Family as “a *discourse* of control” John Muncie and Roger Sapsford argue that, “to define people as ‘mother’, ‘father’ and ‘child’ rather than ‘female adult’, ‘male adult’ and ‘young male or female’ strongly implies duties from them and asymmetrical [power] relations between them which might not otherwise be taken for granted”.<sup>203</sup> Discourses or ideologies of family function like unwritten rules that shape the roles that individuals play within them.

Specific roles, as opposed to “total persons”, can be seen to focus attention on certain functions, attributes or the division of labour. Joan D. Atwood, working from a social constructionist perspective, argues that once roles are established the actual people who fulfil them become largely “interchangeable”.<sup>204</sup> Whether he is demanding that a different youngest son be found, or casting Sole, Carmen and Alicia one after another in the role of love interest, Santiago is presented as taking this notion to the extreme. His readiness and power to exchange one (social) actor for another to fulfil a role is presented as an articulation of his lack of respect or compassion for the “total person”. This selfish disregard is very poignantly expressed in the brief scene in which Nico retreats to a bathroom for a moment of quiet reflection after the pipe

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<sup>203</sup> Muncie and Sapsford (1995: 18).

<sup>204</sup> Atwood (1996: 7).

incident at the breakfast table. Initially the side of Nico's head appears blurred in the foreground on the far left, while the right hand side of the screen is filled with a medium close-up of his reflected image in perfect focus. This then shifts to a head-shot of his reflection alone as, after staring intensely at himself, he proceeds to perform a Clark Kent/Superman-esque transformation by taking off the glasses Santiago so objected to. This scene is a visual expression of the difficult situation that Nico faces. Facets of his "total person" appear fragmented on screen, with the emphasis placed on his reflected image; his physical appearance, which is presented as something he can and does alter in order to better fulfil what Santiago expects of him in his role as 'youngest son'. For Nico this transformation constitutes a serious sacrifice, as he requires his glasses to see, however, the scene captures his compulsion to subordinate this fundamental need to Santiago's expectations. Composition and focus are used to direct the spectator's attention as they work together to stress the psychological and physical price paid by those trying to live up to the exigencies of the role assigned to them by the patriarchal family script. Moreover, using a child, coded as the most vulnerable family member, serves to further emphasise the cruel weight of this constant pressure to conform to The Traditional Family.

Much of *Familia* is concerned with the performance of everyday life; mundane actions like waking up, getting ready for the day ahead, quarreling, preparing food, sharing meals, sleeping siesta, having sex, whiling away lazy afternoons, doing household chores, reading, watching the television and simply spending time with other family members. These actions are presented as the familiar routines and rituals that clarify roles, delineate boundaries and define the rules that

serve “to stabilize the family [identity] and affirm its shared belief system”.<sup>205</sup> They are also the everyday actions onto which ideologies imprint or inscribe themselves and through which family power dynamics are enacted.<sup>206</sup> For example, age and gender stereotypes and imbalances within The Traditional Family are reinforced when Carmen asks Luna to fetch the chocolate biscuits for her younger brother, and Carmen when is responsible for preparing and serving food, while Santiago sits at the head of the table presiding over proceedings. Indeed, it is the female actresses, particularly Carmen and Luna, who are presented as shouldering much of the burden of performance, as though acknowledging the traditional uneven division of labour within families according to gender.

The pioneering family therapist John Byng-Hall introduced the concept of “family scripts” to describe the shared expectations of how family roles and routines are performed within various contexts.<sup>207</sup> Drawing on John H. Gagnon and William Simon’s work on sexual conduct, Deborah Chambers has expanded this concept to argue that family practices can be conceived as “socially scripted behaviour”.<sup>208</sup> Commenting on the usually automatic quality of such scripts, Byng-Hall states: “imagine having to negotiate every action without familiar pathways – we would never get beyond breakfast!”<sup>209</sup> This remark seems particularly apposite in relation to *Familia* as the pipe, which does not fit in Santiago’s script, threatens to derail the performance almost before it has started. It may be useful here to extend Judith Butler’s observations on gender to The Traditional Family. She argues that gender can be understood as a rehearsed act, like “a script [that] survives the particular actors

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<sup>205</sup> Bennet, Wolin and McAvity (1988: 215).

<sup>206</sup> See Hall (1985: 99) as well as Baxter and Braithwaite (2006: 261-262).

<sup>207</sup> See Byng-Hall (1995: 4).

<sup>208</sup> Chambers (2001: 27) and Gagnon and Simon (1973: 19-26).

<sup>209</sup> Byng-Hall (1995: 3).

who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again”.<sup>210</sup> As Annette Kuhn points out, “acting is regarded as an activity that involves pretence, dissimulation, and intent to seem to be something or someone one is, in reality, not”.<sup>211</sup> However, in *Familia* the actors do not simply passively disappear into their roles, rather they enter into a more active dialectical relationship with them. Indeed, as León de Aranoa places self-conscious performances alongside social structures that usually remain opaque it is as though he is seeking to employ the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, through which “the spectator is brought to look critically even at what he has so far taken for granted”.<sup>212</sup> By revealing the twist in the tale near the beginning, León de Aranoa invites the spectator to see and evaluate the mechanisms of family throughout the film, to view them simultaneously, rather than having to re-evaluate everything they have seen at the end.<sup>213</sup> In this way *Familia* (re)presents the perceived inevitability and naturalness of family as a social construction or set of interconnecting performances that are, quite literally, man-made.

The performative, scripted character of family life becomes particularly obvious in the case of special celebrations, such as birthdays, saints’ days or weddings, where the acts of gathering together, eating together and having group photographs taken all form part of the family-centred rituals that make up such occasions. *Familia*, like a number of other Spanish films, including *Mamá cumple*

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<sup>210</sup> Butler (1988: 521).

<sup>211</sup> Kuhn (1985: 52).

<sup>212</sup> Willett (1977: 179). Although difficult to translate, the *Verfremdungseffekt* is usually rendered as alienation or estrangement effect. However, as Willett comments, “[*Verfremdung*] does not mean ‘alienating’ the spectator in the sense of making him hostile to the play. It is a matter of detachment, of reorientation” (1977: 177). See also Schechner (2002: 152-154).

<sup>213</sup> León de Aranoa has stated that he wanted to reverse the “twist at the end” technique used in films like David Mamet’s *House of Games* (1987) and *Homicide* (1991), see Ponga, Martín and Torreiro (2002: 60).

*cien años* (Saura, 1979) and *Demonios en el jardín* (Gutiérrez Aragón, 1982), or more recently *La vida de nadie* (Cortés, 2002), the Spanish Dogme 95 film *Días de voda/Días de boda* (Juan Pinzás, 2002) and *Una preciosa puesta del sol* (Álvaro del Amo, 2003), uses these rituals as ideologically loaded framing devices. They create moments of heightened expectation and pressure, ideal opportunities for revealing the discrepancies between The Traditional Family and families that are in fact falling apart, on bad terms, and/or built on lies.

### 1.3 Narrating The Family: Oral, Aural and Visual (Re)presentations

Just as the performance of roles, routines and rituals of everyday life is presented in *Familia* as central to the (re)production and (re)affirmation of The Traditional Family, the same can be said about oral, aural and visual representations of family. These consist of the stories and images that are continually used to weave together the family we live *with* and The Family which we live *by*; as Judith Roof contends, “narrative both operates like ideology and is shaped by ideology”.<sup>214</sup> In their work on the frequency and duration of family storytelling, Kristin Langellier and Eric Peterson note that narrating “sediments content, stabilizes family meanings, and canonizes family classics”.<sup>215</sup> The following section considers how *Familia* presents the creation and/or sharing of these narratives as an ongoing process in need of constant reiteration and development. It also looks at how and to what effect an emphasis is placed on maintaining the coherence of family narratives as a means of keeping up appearances, and the role that internal and external spectators/participants play in this process.

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<sup>214</sup> Roof (2000: 214).

<sup>215</sup> Langellier and Peterson (2004: 68-69).

A useful starting point for examining what function family narratives play in *Familia* is Langellier and Peterson's observation that:

In family storytelling, family members learn the special moments to record and anticipate. Family turning points such as courtships, births, and infant tales are generic and overdetermined. Their high visibility legitimates family interests of survival and reproduction, and their tellability fits in with retrospective-prospective trajectories of a family future. In these ways turning points help to seamlessly reproduce family ideology and hegemony.<sup>216</sup>

The first part of *Familia* contains several narratives that revolve around such family 'turning points', including the story of Santiago's birth, the first time he met his parents-in-law, and his brother's wedding. These are all narratives that (re)produce the dominant biological, conjugal, middle-class family. Stories are also told of memorable family holidays in Western European capitals (Rome, Amsterdam, Paris, Berlin) during the mid-1970s. That Santiago's family, whether fictitious or not, was wealthy enough during this era to holiday in such expensive destinations aligns them either ideologically with the Franco regime and/or financially with the 'economic miracle' of the 1960s and 70s.<sup>217</sup> Santiago's unspecified, though assumed sexual, history with his 'sister-in-law' Sole works as an example of how narratives of The Family "are constructed in and through inclusions and exclusions".<sup>218</sup> This aspect is examined in greater depth in the following chapters, in relation to the traditional exclusion of stories of gender inequalities, domestic violence, homosexuality, sexual activity, race and ethnicity from the dominant ideology of The Family in Spain.

The level of detail in some of these narratives, such as that of Santiago's birth, told collectively by Rosa, his 'mother', Martín, his 'friend' and Santiago himself,

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<sup>216</sup> Langellier and Peterson (2004: 126).

<sup>217</sup> See Hooper (2006: 23-25).

<sup>218</sup> Langellier and Peterson (2004: 124).

increases the sense that what the actors have been asked to perform is part of a real life story. Rosa, named by Carmen as Santiago's 'autora [biológica]', recounts a seemingly unquestionable version of events, corroborated and added to by Martín and Santiago. Their air of veracity is strengthened by Rosa, who evokes the universally recognised physical pain she says she suffered while giving birth, and by Santiago's claim that she never lets him forget it because she repeats the story every year. This emphasis on repetition helps to move the story into the realm of ritual, increasing its credibility by conferring upon it the canonical status of a family "classic", which then acts as a powerful "emotional anchor" connecting family members.<sup>219</sup> Even on subsequent viewings of the film, when the spectator is aware of the theatrical scenario from the beginning, the scene's evocation of childbirth remains curiously convincing, indicative of the manner in which The Traditional Family has tended to privilege narratives of biological reproduction and blood relations.

Langellier and Peterson contend that family storytelling is not just a retrospective repository of stories but an ongoing practice or performance, through which members of the family actively participate as tellers, listeners, narrators, and characters.<sup>220</sup> As children, Carlos, Luna and Nico's task is primarily to listen and learn from this kind of "multigenerational creation" in order to understand where they come from and what they are part of, with the implication that one day it will be their responsibility to retell family narratives.<sup>221</sup> Seen in this light, Carlos's accurate knowledge about the places the family went on holiday when he was just a small child is somehow out of place. The adults, Rosa, Carmen, Ventura and Sole, are expected by Santiago to fulfil any and all of the roles of teller, listener, narrator and character:

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<sup>219</sup> Wilkes Karraker and Grochowski (2006: 327).

<sup>220</sup> Langellier and Peterson (2006c: 108).

<sup>221</sup> Langellier and Peterson (2006b: 111).

moreover, he is presented as needing them to be able, not just to share in, but also to contribute to, family narratives. As discussed above, Rosa, presented as the most experienced of the actors not just in terms of age but also because of her impressive ability to affect convincing tears, succeeds in making the story of Santiago's birth particularly compelling. Her well-prepared intervention is full of intimate detail and corroborated by references to others who were present. It is a masterful performance that, in its careful construction, paradoxically reinforces the impression of naturalness. It also speaks to the oft-repeated association of women, and especially mothers, not just with domestic burdens but also with the role of preserving family memories, artefacts and photographs; a motif seen in all of the films that form the focus of this thesis.<sup>222</sup>

By contrast, Carmen, Ventura and Sole, the younger adults, who seem not to have studied their parts so well, flounder when Santiago tries to engage them as tellers, narrators, and characters. Indeed, one of the sources of the slightly uneasy humour that pervades the film is derived from their attempts and failure to participate in Santiago's family narrative. For example, in the scene where Santiago tries to reminisce about family holidays during his birthday lunch, Carmen and Ventura visibly become increasingly uncomfortable as they get details wrong and embarrassingly have to resort to improvising around generalities:

Santiago: Y el año anterior en Ámsterdam.  
 Ventura: Ámsterdam, ¡precioso!  
 Santiago: Menudo viaje. ¿Os acordáis?  
 Carmen: Perfectamente, los canales, la gente en bicicleta.  
 Santiago: Allí encargamos a Luna.

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<sup>222</sup> Rose (2003: 8).



- Carmen: Fue como una segunda luna de miel.  
 Santiago: Un momento, ¿o fue en París?  
 Ventura: ...París, ¡precioso también!  
 Carmen: ¿En París?  
 Santiago: Seguro, seguro, fue en París.  
 Carmen: ¡Ay ! tienes razón fue en París, el Sena, la Torre Eiffel.

What should have been an enjoyable trip down memory lane becomes more like an examination, or a quiz show gone wrong (Carmen: “Vaya por Dios, no damos una eh”). Ventura’s banal interjections, and Carmen’s guide-book-style responses border on the farcical and their mistakes endanger belief, and the suspension of disbelief by disturbing the smooth (re)production of family narratives. This disruption is reflected in the cinematography as an affirmative medium shot of the family raising their glasses to Santiago (the creation of a new happy memory), followed by a series of rapid cuts between head and shoulder shots (thirty seven in just over a minute), predominantly of Carmen, Ventura and Santiago, that visually put the characters on the spot. As though making a playful reference to the quiz show he was watching on television at the beginning of the film, the camera intermittently cuts to Nico, whose facial expressions and body language comically register the adults’ mistakes. As both the youngest child and the most junior member of the theatre troupe, the inference is that he should be learning (the family narrative) from Carmen and Ventura. The increased pace of the editing during this exchange builds tension, intensifies Carmen and Ventura’s growing unease, and culminates in a repeat of the initial medium shot in which the celebratory tone is replaced by a long and awkward silence. Moments later, the situation worsens when Carmen makes another mistake when she has to field a phonecall. After a tense moment balance is restored when Santiago, rather than letting her lack of knowledge destabilise his family narrative accommodates it instead,

by giving Carmen's poor memory a history of its own (Santiago: "Hay que ver que cabeza tienes, *siempre se le olvida*").<sup>223</sup> This converts a potential negative into an affirmative as the laughter it provokes visually and emotionally reunites the group. Disaster, in the form of an error derailing his constructed narrative or a breakdown in the fiction that might break the terms of the actors' contract, has been averted. At the same time, the episode affirms the elasticity of family narratives.

In *Familia* the visual is presented as another means of narrating, constructing and (re)producing The Traditional Family. In this respect, it is interesting to note that, if the spectator were to watch the film without sound, they would still be left with a powerful visual, seemingly natural, affirmation of Family that is only likely to be disrupted near the end when Rosa unexpectedly comes back from dead. A very self-conscious allusion to the history of the cinematic image and a commentary on the human urge to make sense of the purely visual is included in the aforementioned sequence where Luna, Carlos, Rosa and Carmen sit inside observing Santiago outside in the garden.<sup>224</sup> Framed by the window, they watch Santiago's conversation with Martín and then his scene with Nico as though it were a silent film. Carlos even dubs Santiago as a means of teasing Luna. In view of Nico's unwitting blunder at the breakfast table, Carmen is baffled by the silent image of his successful bonding session with Santiago, prompting her to exclaim "¡No entiendo nada!". Yet had the spectator watched the film to this point without sound this scene would seem to make perfect sense as an apparently straightforward representation of a father and son's reconciliation after an argument. Indeed, without the knowledge afforded by the

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<sup>223</sup> My italics.

<sup>224</sup> This theme of making sense of the visual reappears throughout the film in the form of "Nubes", a game that Santiago plays first with Nico and then with Alicia, in which the participant has to find a cloud and say what it looks like.

dialogue, the dysfunctionality witnessed (arguments, marital unhappiness, incest and infidelities) is, ironically, more likely to (re)confirm than challenge the assumption that we are watching a family. This is especially relevant in the context of the tradition of dissident filmmaking in Spain, associated with *Familia's* producer Elías Querejeta in the late 1960s and 1970s, within which the dysfunctional family film might be said to have canonical status.

Implicit in this latent tension between *Familia's* visual and sound tracks is the potential power of the image to create and confer meaning but also to distort and mislead. This is mischievously explored in the film's opening credit sequence in which the camera seems innocently to peruse a colour photograph of a group of men and women of different ages. The sequence can be divided into three sections. In the first section pans and dissolves are used to move the spectator's gaze around the photograph, introducing the characters one by one and superimposing actors' names over these images. In the second section the camera zooms out to reveal the 'whole picture', a photograph that, convention tells us, is a family portrait, an assumption promptly confirmed by the appearance of the title *Familia*, which appears in the heart of the group. The third section is composed of a series of almost abstract close-ups of parts of the photograph. In contrast to the first section all the images here are pertinent to the role of the member of the technical team being credited at that moment. For example, a close-up of Ventura's lapel is aptly labelled "*vestuario maiki marin*" and another of Carlos's ear is accompanied by the words "*sonido directo gilles ortion*". On first viewing, this sequence simply seems to introduce and inform. However, on closer inspection or on second viewing (once we are aware of the film's scenario) the sequence may be (re)read as a visual commentary on the constructed and sometimes fickle nature of images and The Traditional Family. In the first section, the names of

the actors given do not actually correspond to the people shown, a subtle acknowledgement of the fact that nobody is who they appear to be in this photograph. It is easy to read these figures as grandmother', 'mother and father', 'wife and husband', 'son', 'daughter', 'brother', 'sister' and therefore accept the label 'family' attached to the group. However, the subsequent development of the narrative subverts these definitions, reminding us how arbitrary the relationship between the signifier and signified can be. At the same time, as though referring to the overall argument of the film, the sequence seems to suggest that a closer examination of Family and how it is (re)presented may reveal something of what is taken for granted and that which usually remains hidden. A palimpsestic portrait, it contains several overlapping, complementary and contradictory familial relations. These include the fictional family of the title, the theatrical troupe presented as a sort of dysfunctional surrogate family, and parts of what is a 'real' family within the diegesis (Carmen and Sole are sisters and Carmen and Ventura are married, alluded to by their holding hands). Likewise in the third section, everything is not as it first seems. The credit "*maquilladora milu cabrer*" appears over a close-up of a woman's closed lips that belongs to a different photograph. While "*guión y dirección fernando león de aranoa*" is likewise shown over an image that does not correspond to the photograph the rest of the sequence is based on, leading us to suspect that this is the film's actual author and director visually, albeit obliquely, inserted into the text. Kuhn argues that "as part of a vast industry devoted largely to the cultivation of ideal images of the family, family photography constrains our remembering, [and] tries to funnel our memories into particular channels".<sup>225</sup> However, in *Familia's* opening credits, the fragmentation of the family photograph created by the use of close-ups and the inclusion of subtle

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<sup>225</sup> Kuhn (2002: 152).

anomalies invites the spectator to engage in detective work. This points, from the beginning, to the need for critical (re)viewing practices in relation to both *The Traditional Family* and representations of family. Notably, although such viewing practices may offer some answers they also constantly raise further questions that have implications outside the diegesis in everyday experiences of family.

When, later in the film, the spectator is shown the sequence in which the family photograph from the opening credits is apparently taken, matters are further complicated. An argument about who should stand where for the photographs escalates, culminating in Rosa slapping Santiago in the face. She is apparently incensed by the lack of respect implied by his raised voice and the reference he makes to a past history of domestic violence (Santiago: “¿Cómo hay que decirte las cosas, a hostias como papá?”). This is an admission that, because of Alicia’s presence, amounts to washing the family’s dirty laundry in public. In response, Rosa patently disregards Santiago’s injunction to present a happy face to the camera. As though trying to smooth over the cracks he has just opened up through his argument with Rosa, Santiago tells everyone to smile, “sonríe Nico, tú también Luna sonríe, vamos Sole, Alicia por favor sonríe, vamos a sonreír todos ¡sonreíd!”. Still in a fit of pique, however, Rosa is looking down and away from the rest of the family at the moment the photograph is taken. This confounds the expectations established by the image from the credit sequence in which the entire family is smiling broadly. Kuhn’s observations are again useful here as she notes that photographs are often sites of conflicting memories, which raise the question of “whose memory is to prevail in the family archive?”<sup>226</sup> Although the film opens with a happy image of *The Traditional Family* suggesting that it is Santiago’s memory that will win out, the later sequence

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 14.

destabilises this. The publicity material for the film, which uses yet another variation of this family portrait, continues the play between slightly but significantly different versions of the same image [Figure 2 and Stills 3 and 4].

That appearances can be deceiving is a cliché and yet it is important to recognise that, while the source of this deception often lies with the creator of an image, the spectator also plays a part by unquestioningly fitting what they see to accepted social norms. This tendency is articulated in the film through the character of Alicia, the internal spectator, who arrives and sees what she perceives to be “una familia así tan normal”. Yet, as León de Aranoa says of Alicia’s experience, she enters into “una familia que parece inicialmente ‘el país de las maravillas’ pero que al cruzar al otro lado y ver su interior, se descubre como una realidad llena de grietas por todas partes”.<sup>227</sup> Similarly, no sooner have we, as extradiegetic spectators, accepted the “cereal packet family” image initially presented to us, then the illusion is shattered.<sup>228</sup>

Marianne Hirsch’s pioneering work on family narratives and photography is a useful starting point when considering how the dynamics surrounding internal and extradiegetic spectatorship in *Familia* reveal, comment on and subvert the performative nature of The Traditional Family. Particularly pertinent is her concept of “family frames” that she describes as being composed of the “familial gaze” that works together with the “familial look”. The former situates “human subjects in the ideology, the mythology, of the family as an institution” while the latter is “a mutual, affiliative look through which we are sutured into the image and through which we

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<sup>227</sup> Heredero (1997: 533).

<sup>228</sup> Anthropologist Edmund Leach coined the phrase “the cereal-packet norm family” (1968) in the sixties to describe the kind of “normal”, “happy” family used in advertising campaigns.

adopt the image into our own familial narrative”.<sup>229</sup> Crucial to Santiago’s experience and acceptance of his fictional family are the gazes and looks of others that reaffirm his desired identity and relationships.

This first becomes apparent in the sequence by the swimming pool when Nico tries to make amends for his earlier failure and works to persuade Santiago to accept him. Placing the emphasis on physical appearance, Santiago voices his concern to Martín that “No se me parece en nada”. The camera angles and editing then capture the triangular series of looks that pass between Nico, Santiago and Martín. Through the repeated use of the two shot/reverse shot (two shots of Nico and Santiago/reverse shots of Martín watching them), Martín seems to take on the function of a mirror reflecting an image of ‘father and son’ back at Santiago, thereby giving him the reassurance he needs. At the same time, he verbally addresses his friend’s reservations by pointing out their physical similarities, significantly stressing the visual by referring to their eyes (Martín: “Es moreno, y los ojos los tenéis iguales”). Barrett and McIntosh describe such interest in physical likenesses as “the desire for outward tokens of similarity, familiarity and belonging” that genetic inheritance represents, a desire made clear when Santiago initially rejects Nico, not having seen in him the son he wanted.<sup>230</sup> As with the earlier birth narrative, this points to the privileging of biological relationships within The Traditional Family.

The confirmatory function of Martín’s gaze seems to be amplified in that of the character of Alicia. It is implied that because she is an outsider her gaze is more objective and therefore, for Santiago, her observations possess an even greater affirmative power. Luna is convinced that the stranger will know that they are not a

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<sup>229</sup> Hirsch (1997: 11 and 93).

<sup>230</sup> Barrett and McIntosh (1991: 22-23).

family “en cuanto entre”, and yet, Alicia unquestioningly reaffirms the family on the basis of what she sees. As she and Santiago enter the living room, the principal “stage” of the domestic sphere, they appear in sharp focus on either side of the screen, thereby framing the scene within. As Santiago introduces the theatre troupe simply as “mi familia”, the camera travels forward, bringing the enunciated family into focus and coming to rest on a well-balanced group portrait. The deep colours, wood panelling and the careful arrangement of the actors around the large fireplace, which traditionally functioned as the practical and symbolic centre of the home, are reminiscent of the kind of iconic images of important families painted by Velázquez or Van Dyck. Discussing the power of such images to convey meaning and draw the spectator in, Hirsch states:

When looking at family portraits of somebody else, the familial gaze is activated. We almost immediately assume the potentiality of a whole network of familial relations and an intertextual network of family pictures. The familial gaze, enacted by family portraits, projects familiarity onto the portrayed subjects, but also draws the looker into this network of familiarity.<sup>231</sup>

In *Familia* just such a complex web of familial gazes and looks are in operation. In the affirmative they work to keep up appearances by suturing the diegetic and extra-diegetic spectators into the mythology of The Traditional Family, while the critical disrupt and challenge this ideal.

Santiago’s apparent need to share such visual and aural representations about family and with family often seems to express an autobiographical compulsion as much as any desire to create a group identity. He initiates the family photograph and is also presented as the sole author of the narratives that he has given to the actors to

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<sup>231</sup> Van Alphen (1999: 46). My italics.



learn by heart; they are quite literally his-stories.<sup>232</sup> This is an aspect of the film that has particular resonance because the form and functions of The Traditional Family have been shaped by and subject to patriarchal needs and desires. In *Familia* it is the female actors in particular who are shown to be pivotal to the plot only insofar as they serve to (re)produce and (re)present Santiago's his-story. Looking to Kuhn's proposition that, "telling stories about the past, our past, is a key moment in the making of our selves", Santiago's control over such stories could be read as an expression of the power patriarchy has had, not only to dominate The Traditional Family narrative, but also to inhibit change and innovation that might come about through the self-narratives of others.<sup>233</sup> It is this kind of suppression or erasure of alternative narratives and scripts that women's and Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transexual (GLBT) movements have challenged during the second half of the twentieth century by placing previously marginal personal narratives at the heart of their theoretical and analytical writing. Indeed, Jeanne Perreault argues that "'I' and 'we' are the most important words in the writing(s) of contemporary feminism, continuously transformed and re-enacted as feminists claim the rights of self-definition".<sup>234</sup> Santiago's conception of self is presented as being reaffirmed at the expense of all the family members, but most particularly Rosa, Carmen and Luna, whose 'I' and 'we' of are subsumed and determined by Santiago's narratives. Although Carmen is arguably the character about whom the spectator is given most information, even these details of her life only ever have to do with her relationship to Santiago or her actual husband Ventura. This subordination of women's subjectivity to the patriarchal

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<sup>232</sup> The term his-story is used here "to point out the taken-for-granted privileges of men and to suggest the ways women and their lives have been ignored or underrated in standard history texts" (Herbst, 2001: 138).

<sup>233</sup> Kuhn (2002: 2).

<sup>234</sup> Perreault (1998: 190). For other recent examples see Hirsch (1999) and Young (2001).

family narrative is examined in greater depth in the discussion of Bollaín's *Te doy mis ojos* in Chapter Three.

#### 1.4 Home Rules: Patriarchal Author(ity), Boundaries and Taboo

Rosa is explicitly named as “la autora” in honour of the creative force and role that being a biological mother implies. However, it is Santiago, a man paying for the privilege of acting as a patriarch for the day, who is presented as the character that wields both literal and symbolic authorial power over the family. In writing the fictional family he creates for himself Santiago is shown to have reproduced The Traditional Family, an ideology or text that is shaped by and satisfies the desires of the patriarch. Apt here is Schechner's observation that it is “no accident that the word ‘authority’ includes the word ‘author’”, on the basis that all writing, in the Derridean sense of an all-inclusive array of cultural expressions and social practices, “enacts agendas of power”.<sup>235</sup> The following section considers how such agendas of power are enacted critically in *Familia* through representations of patriarchal authority and the patriarch as author. Paying particular attention to the characters of Carmen and Luna it also explores the significance of how Santiago, acting as the omnipotent author/*pater familias*, is presented as using and abusing his power by transgressing or threatening to transgress some of the social rules that regulate family life such as the prohibition of adultery and the incest taboo.

It could be argued that The Traditional Family brings with it naturalised assumptions of unconditional love, especially that of parents for their children. However, this expectation is incisively challenged in *Familia* through Santiago's aforementioned treatment of Nico. In the sequence they share by the swimming pool

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<sup>235</sup> Schechner (2002: 126).

the camera focuses on Nico's small hand enveloped in Santiago's larger hand as they walk together by the swimming pool. When they stop, posing for a moment in a 'father/son' two shot, Santiago again asks for Martín's opinion before looking Nico over, as though he were a car he had just test-driven or a suit he had tried on, before making his final decision. The *pater familias* is presented as holding the power to try out his 'son', to treat him as though he were a commodity easily exchanged if deemed faulty or imperfect. Furthermore, the power to include or exclude a family member or to demand affection is overtly presented in *Familia* as the prerogative of the paying patriarch. Conversely, it is implied that the actors opted to relinquish this kind of choice when they agreed to participate in his family fiction in return for money.

As disturbing as it is comical, the way in which Santiago's attitude towards Nico and the rest of the troupe is represented could be read as a critical commentary on the powers and privileges traditionally afforded to the male-breadwinner by other family members in return for his economic support. What was traditionally the dependents' naturalised or tacit acceptance of the uneven relationship between themselves and the male head of the household is rendered explicit in *Familia* in the form of a written contract. However, as Ballesteros has pointed out, it is significant that in *Familia* "el patriarca [...] paga a sus actores para que se ajusten a él, pero depende absolutamente de ellos para que su rol patriarcal simulado sea posible".<sup>236</sup> Without them and their bought compliance he is just a man growing old all alone. That is to say that, in *Familia*, patriarchal privileges and power dynamics are presented not as natural or as indisputable characteristics of The Traditional Family, but rather as a social construct or contract.

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<sup>236</sup> Ballesteros (2001: 288).

Significantly, although the exact terms of the contract are never clearly revealed it is implied that they suit the male actors better than the female actors. On one hand Ventura and Carlos seem only to benefit from supporting Santiago's authority, by ensuring that the performance of the patriarchal family script runs smoothly. On the other Carmen and Luna may gain financially, but they are shown to suffer emotionally and physically as a result (Luna: "A mí es que no me compensa. A Ventura le pone de puta madre pero yo no. Yo voy a tener pesadillas tres meses"). Useful here is Gayle Rubin's work on "the traffic of women", the term she uses to describe how men have historically upheld and increased their social status by using women as tokens of exchange.<sup>237</sup> Within this system men have certain rights over their female kin, while women "do not have full rights to themselves".<sup>238</sup> For example, Ventura is presented as only too willing to ignore or downplay his wife Carmen's obvious discomfort, and seems to have no qualms about using her as a token to help him pay for the 'family car' he has recently bought. When Santiago expects Carmen to join him for a siesta her displeasure is clearly shown but rack focus is then used to refocus the spectator's attention on Ventura's reaction. Carmen may appear in the centre of the frame but she becomes blurred in the background as the camera tracks to the right and, finding the side of Ventura's head in the foreground, shows him in close-up. The tacit deal being made would seem to be between the two men; it is the woman who is being traded in total disregard of her personal wishes or any notion of her right to keep control of her own body.

Carmen's body language during the siesta scene makes it painfully clear that she feels awkward and is on the defensive. The scene fades to black before the

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<sup>237</sup> See Rubin (1975).

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

spectator can see whether or not Santiago is successful in his sexual advances, and consequently we are literally left in the dark about the extent of the physical and emotional price she has to pay. Nevertheless, León de Aranoa leads us to believe that Santiago does have sex with Carmen. Rather than shielding her, according to the conventions of The Traditional Family, her actual husband Ventura is presented as willing to trade her body for his gain and another man's pleasure. Seen within the context of the metadrama, the act would constitute marital rape, a crime which was only made illegal in Spain in 1989, but which was previously an accepted feature of The Traditional Family.<sup>239</sup> Either way Carmen's predicament casts doubt on the extreme dichotomy that has traditionally existed between discourses of the wholesomeness and sanctity of family life and the degraded nature of relationships within the sex trade.

Carmen seems thus caught between two patriarchal wills, which both seek to control her for their own ends. Employing a visual treatment of female characters reminiscent of Sirk's ironic melodramas of the 1950s León de Aranoa repeatedly encloses or traps Carmen in frames within frames in the context of the home. That she often appears contained within mirrors, doorways, corridors, the 'marital' bed or internal and external windows, works visually to corroborate Leslie Weisman's assertion that woman, as homemaker, "has no inviolable space of her own". Developing her point Weisman contends that in her performance of this housebound role, woman is attached to spaces of service, "she is hostess in the living room, a cook in the kitchen, a mother in the children's room, [and] a lover in the bedroom".<sup>240</sup> Carmen is a woman frustrated by her situation both inside and outside the fiction, but

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<sup>239</sup> Regan and Kelly (2003) [accessed 4.9.09].

<sup>240</sup> Weisman (2000: 2).

who is ultimately shown to be reluctant and/or feels unable to rebel against the patriarchal authority that confines her. Capitulating not only to Santiago but also to Ventura she ends up acting as both cook and lover in the kitchen. This is captured by a medium close-up when Ventura, intent on reasserting his claim over his wife by exercising his “marital rights” (Ventura: “Eres mi mujer, tengo todo el derecho del mundo”), makes Carmen lean over the kitchen worktop so that he can penetrate her from behind. Ventura remains just out of focus in the background while Carmen appears in the foreground tightly framed by the internal window she puts her hands against to support herself. Splitting the screen into four, the divisions within this window work to concentrate the spectator’s attention on Carmen’s face, which seems to be registering pain rather than pleasure. The physical and emotional discomfort suggested by her expression is intensified by her right hand, which is shown perilously grasping at the large kitchen knives that fill another of the window’s subdivisions [Still 4]. Not only is this image uncomfortably threatening but it also seems to convey connotations of self-harm, as though equating women’s traditional submission to men in the context of Marriage and The Traditional Family to a form of self-destruction.

The only form of active retaliation that the spectator sees Carmen take is also destructive. Incensed by Ventura’s apparent lack of concern or even interest in what has happened during the siesta, and also by his appeal to think of the family car that needs to be paid for, Carmen seizes a heavy ornamental elephant and drops it out of an upstairs window onto the car’s bonnet. A brief shot of Ventura’s shocked reaction cuts to an optical point-of-view shot showing the badly dented car and the shattered elephant. After a momentary pause, liquid begins to seep from the vehicle, spreading across and between the surrounding paving stones. The high-angle shot looking down

on Carmen's 'victim' and the oozing liquid brings to mind conventional representations of murder in thrillers or horror films. Ventura's attempt to direct their argument into mundane channels – paying the bills – is forcibly interrupted by Carmen's violent act rendered comical by both her 'weapon' and the accompanying non-diegetic jazz music. Nevertheless, the visual associations of the incident's aftermath underscore the horror of Carmen's situation that Ventura seems determined to ignore.

Carmen and Luna are presented as varying dramatically both in their attitude towards patriarchal authority and the roles assigned to them by Santiago. Discussing how attitudes differ between 'mother' and 'daughter' Ballesteros makes the valid argument that they reflect "dos posturas con respeto al patriarcado y la subjetividad sexual de la mujer que, aunque radicalmente opuestas, coexisten en la España posfranquista".<sup>241</sup> *Familia* would therefore seem to illustrate the contrast between a generation of older women who grew up in a society dominated by the monologic discourse of the dictatorship that taught them to be submissive, and a younger generation of women socialised in the post-Franco era to "rebelarse contra el guión impuesto".<sup>242</sup> Just one expression of this is Luna's reaction to the bedroom Santiago has prepared for her. Talking to Carlos she remarks, "Este tío es peligroso, en serio. Mira la habitación, ¿tú crees que esto es normal?" The irony is that the room alone, decorated with posters of Madonna and Bon Jovi, likely to be widely recognised as iconic signifiers of late twentieth century teen culture, does exude an air of normality in line with Luna's age and gender. To start to try to understand the strength and nature of her reaction it is useful to look to Sonia Livingstone's work on adolescents,

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<sup>241</sup> Ballesteros (2001: 289).

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

and the relationship between the bedroom and identity. She describes the teenager's bedroom in affluent Western cultures as a private space of experimentation where possessions are gathered and maintained, and where the interruptions, interference and desires of others can be avoided; and argues that these factors combine to constitute "the basis for the construction of an individual identity". She adds that any form of uninvited intrusion into this space is not only likely to occasion irritation but can also be perceived as "a clash of identities", as the young person feels as though they are being pulled back to a familial identity, that is to say an identity "more defined by others, particularly parents, than by oneself".<sup>243</sup> Drawing on this work it does not seem unreasonable to understand Luna's response as a manifestation of an independent young woman's reluctance to have any aspect of her identity overtly prescribed or dictated to her by anyone else. Moreover, as is analysed in greater depth below, she seems to perceive Santiago's involvement in the creation of this intimate space as indicative of his blatant disregard or failure to respect the implicit rules, boundaries and taboos that regulate father-daughter relationships. However, despite all her protestations Luna is still persuaded to stay by Carlos because of the remuneration. In this way, the film works to de-romanticise The Traditional Family by suggesting that it is not love or solidarity that holds it together, but rather the male-breadwinner's money that has traditionally commanded power and submission.

Santiago's 'true' story and his motives or intentions remain unclear throughout the film, both to the members of the theatre troupe and to the spectator. Details about him, whether directly expressed or implied, are always plausible yet simultaneously cast in doubt. On one hand the tension derived from this contributes to the suspenseful character of the film. On the other it could be understood as another example of the

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<sup>243</sup> Livingstone (2002: 155).



film's critical engagement with patriarchal authority in the family context. The uncertainty and tension are apparent in the relationships Santiago has with members of his 'family' in general, and, once again, Carmen and Luna in particular. They are especially unnerved by the fact that his motives remain unclear. Santiago is often presented as being on the verge of contravening or of taking to unacceptable extremes the conventions of his role as patriarch/employer.

Carmen and Luna are presented as constantly struggling, not only with the level of personal involvement already being demanded from them under the guise of 'professionalism' as actresses, but also with the uncertainty of how much more Santiago may unexpectedly ask of them. In this respect they seem to be protected neither by the conventions of acting nor by the conventions of family life. Although dedication to the performance of The Traditional Family has tended to prevent women from taking control over their own lives, it is nevertheless deemed to provide a measure of certainty. However, the way in which Santiago plays with the boundaries and conventions of family relationships belies this certainty. His power to disrupt or violate socially accepted codes of behaviour implied by The Traditional Family, such as the prohibition of adultery and the incest taboo, seems to point to an inherent potential for the patriarchal abuse of this same power.

Carmen and Luna's marked uneasiness towards Santiago seems to reside in the fact that intimacy inhabits a liminal, problematic space between performance and 'real life'. Intimacy, in this case in the form of the sexual, is presented as a menacing incursion of the 'real' into the game of identities that is being played out, creating moments of tension that are uncomfortable and difficult for Carmen, Luna and the spectator. Given the mystery surrounding Santiago, Luna feels she cannot be certain he will adhere to the social 'rules' that would normally prohibit sexual relations

between fathers and daughters, and constantly fears he may try to take advantage of her. For example, during the only scene when Luna is left on her own with Santiago and he tries to have a frank talk with her about boyfriends and sex, she is deeply disturbed by the level of detail he asks for. Amongst other things he insists on knowing whether her current boyfriend puts the condom on himself or if Luna does it for him, if she was a virgin before she started seeing him, and whether she performs fellatio on him. Santiago justifies his line of questioning by suggesting that sharing this kind of information is only ‘natural’ between a father and a daughter, and that it is a desirable component of good parent – child relationships: “hay ciertas cosas que un padre debería poder hablar con su hija [...] si los padres se hablaran así con sus hijos luego no habría tantos sustos ¿a que no? [...] a mí me parece lo más natural”. However, Luna perceives his insistence as a form of sexual invasion: “¿qué pasa? ¿que le pone cachondo?” Ultimately, it is left unclear whether this is ineptly expressed concern on Santiago’s behalf, and therefore a meditation on the potentially difficult relationship between fathers and their teenage daughters, or if it is in fact a salacious interest in a much younger woman, made more sinister by the family roles they are playing.

León de Aranoa seems to be playing here with the paradox that although The Traditional Family is perceived as protecting its female members and overtly precluding incest, the uneven gendered power dynamics that have traditionally characterised families and patriarchal society as a whole, place women in a vulnerable position. Once again, as in the case of the possible ‘marital’ rape that Santiago commits against Carmen, the potential hypocrisy of The Traditional Family is revealed here. The psychologist Deborah Luepnitz notes that in incest statistics a disproportionate percentage of abusers are men. She suggests that this comes about because men’s socialisation, according to society’s larger script of male dominance,

“psychologically prepare[s] them and socially permit[s] them to behave in ways which make this kind of violation more plausible to them”.<sup>244</sup> In this context it is interesting to note that Carlos may be intrigued by Santiago but does not seem to feel at all threatened by him. For example, although both Luna and Carlos have had a room prepared for them, Carlos finds his funny rather than disturbing. As such the taboos that León de Aranoa seems to be exploring can be seen to have their limits, such as the boundaries that the film plays with being heterosexual. On these grounds it could be argued that *Familia* reinforces a traditional heteronormative view of The Traditional Family, and therefore subscribes to an ideology that it purports to undermine. However, this would be to misunderstand the subtlety of the film’s critical approach which uses slight shifts in perspective on existing norms rather than confronting conventions directly.

The importance of positioning and perspective shifts in the film is emphasised by the ending. In the penultimate scene, the troupe of actors bid Santiago farewell but, after he has disappeared inside, they find themselves stranded on the street outside the house when their van will not start. This is the last the spectator sees of them, a seemingly anticlimactic finish that is in keeping with the realist aesthetic of the film as a whole. Nevertheless, it is significant that they, like The Traditional Family they have been performing, are left in limbo. Moreover, Santiago’s motivations remain unfathomable right up to and beyond the final epilogue-like scene that could also conceivably be a preface in flashback. Breaking one of the taboos fundamental to realist cinema, Santiago, seated comfortably in his study, looks straight at the camera here and apparently starts to tell his story again from the beginning, “Nací el veinte de abril del cuarenta después de diez meses de embarazo...” However credible his

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<sup>244</sup> Luepnitz (1988: 220).

monologue may seem, by the end of the film, the spectator has been positioned to distrust or at the very least question anything that Santiago says or does. This final shift of perspective therefore does nothing to resolve the narrative mystery, which seems to have come full-circle, neither does Santiago deliver the kind of punchline that might be associated with this kind of direct address in the comic tradition. Instead, it seems to imply Santiago's open acknowledgement of the extradiegetic spectator and of the wider film audience. As Alex Gerbaz notes, direct address is one example of "how the film camera brings a social dimension into its perception, so that it not only faces a social world but is also literally faced by it".<sup>245</sup> Therefore, its use here is not only indicative of how the character is positioned in relation to The Traditional Family but also of the socially critical position taken up by the film as a whole.

### 1.5 Conclusion

Statistics reveal that, at the turn of the twenty-first century, the heterosexual, middle-class, two-parent, three-children family is becoming the exception rather than the rule in Spain.<sup>246</sup> That this family has repeatedly been (re)presented as the norm is a fiction that film, together with television, has been particularly good at perpetuating. However, the depth and subtlety of *Familia's* critical engagement ensures that it does not simply (re)produce The Traditional Family. Indeed, León de Aranoa places The Traditional Family, in its 'natural' middle-class 'habitat', under intense self-conscious scrutiny. Just as the curtains of a stage are drawn back, so the camera penetrates the home to reveal its internal workings, demystifying and parodying the process of

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<sup>245</sup> Gerbaz (2008: 18).

<sup>246</sup> See Reher (1997: 187-190).

perfect family myth-building. However, the compliant teamwork required to support and reproduce The Traditional Family is presented here as something that has to be bought. The overall effect of the film's metadramatic narrative strategy is that the spectator learns to distrust appearances, or is at least encouraged to question and challenge identities that may seem obvious or natural.

In her study *Representing the Family*, Chambers notes that “as ‘family’ comes increasingly to signify subjective meanings of intimate connection rather than formal, objective blood or marriage ties [...] the emphasis is increasingly on ‘doing family’”.<sup>247</sup> That is to say that although previously deemed to be natural and sacred The Traditional Family has come, in the wake of postmodern and poststructural deconstructions of fixed identities, to be understood instead as a socially constructed performance. The emphasis in *Familia* similarly falls on the idea of family as something that is ‘done’ or performed.

In *Familia* The Traditional Family is presented as in crisis, not due to any dramatic, external reasons, but because of the inequalities and expectations that characterise this model of kinship. The limbo in which the troupe of actors is left at the end of the film is symptomatic of this crisis. The ‘family’ is no longer together, but its members have not managed to fully escape from the patriarch’s sphere of influence. There is neither a unified family group here, an iconic signifier of narrative resolution in film,<sup>248</sup> nor is there complete breakdown or dissolution. Like the game of “nubes” that plays in the background of the closing credits, we are open to suggestion and everything is a matter of interpretation. Santiago’s story and The Traditional

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<sup>247</sup> Chambers (2001: 168).

<sup>248</sup> See Harwood (1997: 11).

Family are only 'true' inasmuch as we believe in them or, at the very least, do not challenge the definition.

However, this postmodern stance on The Family is not articulated using overtly experimental cinematic techniques or the kind of ebullient aesthetics used by Almodóvar in his representations of obviously subversive family constellations. Instead, León de Aranoa employs a naturalistic aesthetic throughout *Familia*, countered but never cancelled out by the peculiar scenarios, playful use of non-diegetic music, melodramatic touches, and moments of horror, humour or both. The film's most effective deconstruction of The Traditional Family occurs at the points where all of these aspects intersect. This low-key mixing of modes of representation and with a predominantly realist aesthetic is also characteristic of León de Aranoa's subsequent films *Barrio* (1998), *Los lunes al sol* (2002) and *Princesas* (2005). It could therefore be said that, although *Barrio* was the first film to be labelled as *cine social*, *Familia* anticipates or indeed initiates these widely accessible methods that encourage the spectator's critical social engagement with the subject matter. *Familia* also pre-empts many of the issues relating to Family that are covered in greater depth in the next two chapters of this thesis. For example, the matter of how mothers and daughters, in particular, have been haunted by the spectre of The Traditional Family, and how gender hierarchies continue to be perpetuated through the institution of Marriage.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LIVING WITH THE SPECTRE OF THE TRADITIONAL FAMILY: MOTHERS, DAUGHTERS AND COMMUNITY IN BENITO ZAMBRANO'S *SOLAS* (1999)

*"I look for her shape and his hand; this is a massive project, very treacherous, very fragile. This is a project in which haunting and phantoms play a central part. This is a project where finding the shape described by her absence captures perfectly the paradox of tracking through time and across all those forces that which makes it mark by being there and not there at the same time."*

Avery F. Gordon (1997), 6.

#### 2.1 Introduction

The surprise critical and box office success of 1999 Benito Zambrano's *Solas* tells the story of María (Ana Fernández), a woman in her mid-thirties who lives alone and struggles to make ends meet in a rundown working class district of an unnamed city in Southern Spain. Also alone is her mother Rosa (María Galiana), an illiterate hardworking woman from a small rural village, who lives in the shadow of her tyrannical husband (Paco de Osca).<sup>249</sup> Estranged from her parents after years of enduring her father's drinking and abusive behaviour, María suddenly and reluctantly has to accommodate her mother for a few days when her father comes to the city for a serious operation. During this time Rosa strikes up a friendship with María's lonely downstairs neighbour Don Emilio (Carlos Álvarez Novoa), a courteous elderly gentleman with no-one for company except his dog Achilles, and María finds out that she is pregnant by her boyfriend Juan (Juan Fernández), a long distance lorry driver.

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<sup>249</sup> Although María's mother will predominantly be referred to as Rosa throughout this chapter it should be noted that significantly we do not find out her name until twenty minutes from the end of the film just before she returns to the *pueblo*.

The latter's idea of support is to offer to pay for an abortion and María, unwilling to confide in anyone, reacts by trying to drown her sorrows at the local bar. Rosa witnesses her daughter's alcohol dependency and profound unhappiness. When she has to return with her husband to the village, Rosa introduces María to Don Emilio in the hope that they might help each other. During a cathartic, night-long conversation, the old man and young woman tell their stories and as the day dawns Don Emilio offers to support María and her unborn child as an *abuelo adoptivo*. In the closing sequence María, her baby daughter Rosa and Don Emilio visit the cemetery where both her mother and father have recently been interred. In an explanatory voice-over, that seems to take the form of a letter to her dead mother, María tells the spectator about life with her baby daughter and Don Emilio.

The gendered roles, identities and power dynamics experienced by women within the context of The Traditional Family form the central focus of the narrative in *Solas*. Much has been written about the increased freedoms legislated and fought for and experienced by women in post-Franco Spain.<sup>250</sup> From the 1970s onwards a range of factors including the increasing prominence of discourses of gender equality and democracy, the campaigns of feminist activists, and latterly the work of the Instituto de la Mujer (established in 1983), have played a significant part in dismantling and disavowing what Aurora Morcillo has called the discourse of “true Catholic womanhood”.<sup>251</sup> Promoted under Franco, but with a longer history in Spain and elsewhere, this discourse identified Motherhood as a woman's natural and ideal vocation.<sup>252</sup> However, as Anny Brooksbank Jones notes, “[the] percolation of feminist

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<sup>250</sup> See, for example, Telo (1986), Brooksbank Jones (1995) and (1997), Nuño Gómez (1999), Rahola (2000) and Threlfall, Cousins and Valiente (Eds) (2005).

<sup>251</sup> Morcillo (2000: 3). On the Instituto de la Mujer see Valiente (1995).

<sup>252</sup> See Nash (1983) and (1999) on the antecedents of this Francoist discourse.



assumptions through key areas of Spanish society”, and “the subsequent social and politico-juridical institutionalization of some of its less controversial assumptions have undoubtedly helped to shift the focus of (especially younger and middle-class) women from family to career”.<sup>253</sup> These developments may have improved rather than transformed lived realities, but perhaps most importantly they have helped to (re)imagine what should and should not be expected of women in Spain at the turn of the twenty-first century.<sup>254</sup> Nevertheless, that ‘women’s issues’, such as the legalisation of contraception and decriminalisation of abortion, were and continue to be opposed on the basis of their perceived negative impact on The Traditional Family, is indicative of the continuing cultural slippage between woman/mother, mother/family, to which this chapter tries to be sensitive.<sup>255</sup> However, it is also important to recognise that despite cultural shifts, advances in reproductive technologies and second-wave feminist critiques that recognised motherhood as the primary site of women’s oppression, mothering continues to take up a large part of many women’s work and lives.<sup>256</sup>

On this basis it is helpful to start by noting that any discussion of mothers benefits from first distinguishing between ideologies of Motherhood and the experience or labour of mothering. These terms are often used interchangeably in common parlance and scholarly writing, but reveal subtle yet important differences when placed under closer scrutiny. Historical deconstructions and revisions undertaken by feminists have been pivotal in recognising Motherhood as “a site of

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<sup>253</sup> Brooksbank Jones (1995: 387).

<sup>254</sup> See EFE (2003b) [accessed 21.2.05] and IM: Estadísticas (2001) [accessed 17.11.08].

<sup>255</sup> See Brooksbank Jones (1997: 1-39) and Threlfall (2005).

<sup>256</sup> See footnote 15.

contested meanings and values” rather than as a biological given.<sup>257</sup> As Carol Smart has argued, Motherhood is not a natural condition but rather “an institution [or ideology] that *presents* itself as a natural outcome of biologically given gender differences, as a natural consequence of (hetero)sexual activity, and as a natural manifestation of an innate female characteristic, namely the maternal instinct”.<sup>258</sup> This suggests that Motherhood is better understood as a patriarchally defined, historically located, culturally specific, gendered social construction, naturalised and institutionalised through social, medical, political and other discourses. In these terms Motherhood encompasses an ideal of The Mother against which mothers and mothering are measured and found to be lacking (bad) or successful (good). By contrast, mothering may, as Adrienne Rich argues, be perceived as “the *potential* relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children”,<sup>259</sup> and as the conventionally feminine-coded emotional and physical labour aimed at nurturing and preserving life, fostering growth and socialising new generations. As indicated above, this is not to suggest that mothering is located outside ideologies of Motherhood. However, making a distinction between the two enables us to better recognise and analyse the differences between women and their varying experiences of mothering, thereby providing a potential means of interrupting the dominant patriarchal narrative of Motherhood.

Much of the criticism of *Solas* has pivoted around what some scholars have considered to be the film’s (re)production of this dominant narrative, that binds women’s fulfilment to Motherhood and The Traditional Family. For example, Barbara Zecchi suggests that the film’s anti-patriarchal intent is undermined by its ending that

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<sup>257</sup> Smart (1996: 56). See also Glenn (1994) and Silva and Smart (Eds) (1999).

<sup>258</sup> Smart (1996: 37).

<sup>259</sup> Rich (1976: 13).

she perceives to be “the intrusion of the hegemonic call to maternity”. She believes that Motherhood is presented “as *the* solution to María’s alcoholism, to her insomnia, to her pain, and probably to her economic problems”.<sup>260</sup> Drawing on critical arguments about mothers, mothering and Motherhood, including those introduced above, this chapter offers an alternative reading of *Solas* that combines an acknowledgement of the film’s limitations with an appreciation of the ‘reconstructed’ portrait of femininity and mothering that it offers. It explores the notion that the film’s treatment of the past could be considered less as a dangerous regression that threatens progress for women, and more as a call for the need to learn from what has gone before in order to move forward.

In films made between 1996 and 2004 mothers, if included at all, are predominantly (re)presented as incidental background characters. Indeed in a number of films, ranging from Bajo Ulloa’s *Airbag* (1997) to Almodóvar’s *La mala educación* (2004), mother figures appear but have little narrative significance beyond the inference that they gave birth to and brought up the (male) protagonists. The reproductive labour of mothering remains invisible in these films and they do little to question or disrupt the perpetuation of a culturally dominant model of the passive, nurturing mother. By contrast only a few films from this period, including *Solas*, place the figure of the mother, experiences of mothering, and women’s complex relationship to it, at the heart of their narratives. For example, in *Insomnio* (Chus Gutiérrez, 1997), *Me llamo Sara* (Dolores Payás, 1998), *Dones* (Colell, 2000), *En la ciudad* (Gay, 2003), *Mi vida sin mí/My Life Without Me* (Isabel Coixet, 2003) and *Una preciosa puesta del sol* (del Amo, 2003) one or several of the central characters are women (re)negotiating what it means to be a woman and a mother at the turn of

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<sup>260</sup> Zecchi (2005: 151). My italics.

the twenty-first century. However, *Solas*, more than any of the others, is of particular interest to the current study because of its representation of family and the modes of representation it employs. Furthermore, *Solas* brings a plethora of other serious social issues to the screen including urban deprivation, sexism, unemployment, the limited work prospects of poorly educated women, abortion, alcoholism, drugs, abusive relationships, and, as the title indicates, loneliness. However, rather than forming the subject matter of the film, these issues set the realistic, socially engaged tone that frames the central concerns of the narrative: the problematic mother – daughter relationship between Rosa and María, and the often invisible labour of women as wives and mothers.

An independent feature made on a very small budget cobbled together from several different sources, *Solas*, Zambrano's debut feature was released in over twenty countries and was well received by critics and audiences both at home and abroad.<sup>261</sup> Gerard Dapena argues that this success came about despite a minimal publicity campaign, and was largely due to glowing reviews and word of mouth.<sup>262</sup> Ironically, or perhaps tellingly, the film might never have achieved nationwide distribution in Spain, or certainly not on the scale that it did, had it not been for its selection by and critical success at the 1999 Berlinale.<sup>263</sup> The film's character-driven narrative, contemporary setting, predominantly gritty aesthetics and engagement with social

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<sup>261</sup> Zambrano obtained small amounts of public funding from the Ministerio de Educación y Cultura (ICAA) and the European Union MEDIA II Programme. The MCU database puts the number of spectators in Spain at just under one million, see MCU: *Solas* [accessed 10.4.09]. See also IMDb Release Dates: *Solas* [accessed 10.4.09] and the Primary Filmography for award details.

<sup>262</sup> Dapena (2002: 26).

<sup>263</sup> See del Pino (2003: 11). Shown at the Berlinale as part of the Panorama Section alongside other socially situated dramas that revolve around the family such as Tim Roth's *The War Zone* (1999) and Constantine Giannaris's *Apo tin akri tis polis/From The Edge Of The City* (1998), *Solas* received the Panorama Audience Award, the Special Prize of the Ecumenical Jury and a Recommendation from the Confédération Internationale des Cinémas d'Art et d'Essai Européens (this last category was won by Roth's *The War Zone*).

issues has led a number of critics and scholars to categorise it as *cine social*.<sup>264</sup> A high degree of surface realism is used to represent the spaces in which Zambrano's characters move. Indeed, as Smith has commented, Zambrano sometimes "lay[s] the social realism on a bit thick: buses seem packed with punks and every street corner has its retinue of junkies and homeless".<sup>265</sup> However, despite rendering these signs of dysfunctionality highly visible the film is predominantly concerned with the inner, emotional landscapes of the characters. These are powerfully evoked through the understated yet compelling performances by Ana Fernández (María), María Galiana (Rosa) and Carlos Álvarez Novoa (Don Emilio).<sup>266</sup>

Although most of *Solas* is characterised by naturalistic aesthetics and a realistic treatment of the abuse and neglect that characterise the working-class environment that María inhabits, non-diegetic music is often used throughout to underscore the emotional dimensions of the narrative. Moreover, the film culminates in a seemingly incongruous fairytale ending: not only does María decide to have and keep her baby, but she also finds non-exploitative male support to help her do so, at the instigation of the mother from whom she had been more or less estranged. The film's everyday, if grim, settings, mixed with this palette of high emotion suggests that it can perhaps best be understood as combining realistic and melodramatic modes of representation. According to Gledhill, "melodrama is not about revolutionary change but about struggles within the *status quo*".<sup>267</sup> And indeed, *Solas*, particularly in view of its conciliatory ending, seems anything but revolutionary. However, as this

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<sup>264</sup> See Smith (2001: 56) and Triana Toribio (2003: 157-158).

<sup>265</sup> Smith (2001: 56).

<sup>266</sup> All three won a string of awards for their work on *Solas* including Goyas from Spain, a Silver Iris from Brussels for Fernández, a Sant Jordi and a Golden India Catalina from Cartagena (Colombia) for Galiana, and Best Actor and Best Actress awards for Álvarez Novoa and Galiana from Tokyo.

<sup>267</sup> Gledhill (1986: 45).

chapter will examine, the film's utopian ending, which may seem so unconvincing in the context of social realism, becomes effective and powerful when seen as the conclusion of a social melodrama that draws on the politics and poetics of both of these modes. Kleinhans has noted that although it lacks the much lauded Sirkian ironic distancing, realist melodrama nevertheless "speaks [...] of that which is unrepresented, misrepresented, and underrepresented in the dominant culture's depiction of the exploited" while working to validate what is "emotionally desirable, but sometimes unattainable".<sup>268</sup> This is an aesthetic approach that, as this chapter argues, points to and aids the ideological work undertaken by the film as it delivers a severe criticism of The Traditional Family and moves towards a utopian incarnation of The Postmodern Family.

## 2.2 Haunted Family Relation(ships)

*Solas* starts at a point in Rosa and María's lives when family relations have already broken down. Moreover, the film presents The Traditional Family, with its rigid gender roles and inherently uneven power dynamics, not as the victim of social dysfunction, as it so often represented in political and religious discourses, but rather as one of the sources of this dysfunction. On being questioned by the doctor as to why her siblings are not there to support their mother, María curtly replies that "una está en Barcelona y dos en el norte buscándose la vida como pueden", an explanation that initially points to the economically motivated interprovincial migration so typical within Spain.<sup>269</sup> However, as the narrative progresses it becomes increasingly clear that the distance María and her siblings have put between themselves and the parental

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<sup>268</sup> Kleinhans (1994: 164 and 163).

<sup>269</sup> See Harrison and Corkhill (2004: 41-46).

home has less to do with financial hardship and more to do with the emotional deprivation and physical abuse they have suffered within the family context. Through an examination of the relationship between mother and daughter and the representation of domestic space this section suggests that *Solas* presents patriarchy, in the form of The Traditional Family and the despotic father figure, as a spectre that haunts the past and the present. It also considers how, consistent with the conventions of melodrama, the tensions between mother and daughter are expressed through a soundtrack and mise-en-scène of repressed emotions and desires.

The explanatory notes about *Solas* included on the DVD describe the film as a “radiografía de una sociedad que soporta una generación de mujeres que muere y otra que sale adelante como puede”. The film quickly establishes the gap between these two generations through Rosa and María’s differing physical appearances, rhythm and demeanours. Rosa’s neat and staid skirt and cardigan combination is immediately recognisable as the ‘uniform’ typically worn by mature women, particularly in rural Spain. Her ample frame, gentle nature and the fact she is almost exclusively shown undertaking nurturing work (washing, shopping, cooking, feeding, caring, cleaning) help make her into the embodiment of the benevolent earth (grand)mother stereotype. By contrast María’s casual jeans, unflattering sweater and shabby coat belong firmly to the present and demonstrate a disregard for ‘feminine’ dress codes. She can and does perform femininity by donning a dress and makeup, but this is presented as a quality she mobilises to enhance her chances of getting a job, rather than as an innate part of her being. María’s slight build, gaunt face and sharp features may comply with contemporary ideals of feminine beauty, but within the context of the film they are presented more as signifiers of the economic hardship that she faces, and also of her cynicism and self-abuse as she eats little and drinks too much. María is shown as

constantly on the move, matching the fast pace of the city, where her mother's slow, laboured steps look out of place.

This juxtaposition of young and old, urban and rural, modernity and tradition, underlines the more fundamental differences between the two female protagonists. Rosa belongs to a generation of women socialised to dedicate their lives to their children and husbands in accordance with the Francoist discourse of Catholic womanhood. María, although born during the dictatorship and socialised within a traditional family, is presented as belonging to a society in which women have been at “the epicentre of” the social, economic and legislative change.<sup>270</sup> However, as Smith points out, “[in *Solas*] contemporary society is depicted both as disturbingly different from the past and as horribly the same: María's freedom to make her own mistakes is as deadening as her mother's enforced captivity”.<sup>271</sup> Indeed, critic Curt Holman describes Ana Fernández's performance of María as “radiating the rage and fear of a prisoner”;<sup>272</sup> a prisoner of a patriarchal inheritance that the film blames for her lack of education and subsequent poor job prospects. As Rosa explains to Don Emilio, “Ella [María] es muy lista. Quería estudiar cuando era chica. Lo que pasa es que el padre no quería y ya sabe usted como son los hombres antiguos”.

Patriarchy, in the literal form of the father or inscribed in Rosa's self-effacing behaviour and María's suffering, is presented as a constant source of friction that haunts this mother-daughter relationship. María is bitter and angry not only with her father but also with her mother, for her unquestioning complicity with the oppressive patriarchal values that have wounded them both. In María's case it could be argued

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<sup>270</sup> Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas (1998: 117).

<sup>271</sup> Smith (2001: 56).

<sup>272</sup> Holman (2001) [accessed 19.6.05].



that her experience of The Traditional Family has led her suffer from what Rich has called “matrophobia”, that is:

[T]he fear not of one’s mother or of motherhood but of *becoming one’s mother* [...] But where a mother is hated to the point of matrophobia there may also be a deep underlying pull toward her, a dread that if one relaxes one’s guard one will identify with her completely.<sup>273</sup>

Zecchi usefully suggests that their conflictive relationship seems to correspond to the Freudian notion of the child’s rejection of the mother and that historically, this brings to mind the period of feminism when women’s emancipation was equated with the negation of the Mother.<sup>274</sup> She quotes Ann Kaplan who notes that a younger generation of women were angry with their mothers on two counts, “first, [because] she would not give us [...] the wherewithal to discover our identities; [and] second, because she failed to protect us adequately against an alien patriarchal culture by which we were psychologically, culturally and (sometimes) physically harmed.”<sup>275</sup> The confirmation of such physical violence at the hands of the patriarch, a source of embarrassment to Rosa and of anger for María, gradually becomes clear through the dialogue as the narrative progresses. Both generations have to live with painful yet invisible psychological and emotional scars, but for the daughter the memories of the mother’s inaction are more like festering wounds that refuse to heal, thereby poisoning their relationship.

This poisonous quality is expressed through María’s acerbic, hostile manner that initially makes her a difficult character to engage with. As Smith points out “Zambrano boldly risks alienating the audience from city girl María” when her first

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<sup>273</sup> Rich (1976: 235). Matrophobia is a term coined by the poet Lynn Sukenick and discussed by Rich (1976: 235-237).

<sup>274</sup> See Zecchi (2005: 149).

<sup>275</sup> Kaplan (1983: 173). See also Hirsch (1989: 162-200).

words of the film are to request a cigarette from the doctor and not, as might be expected, to ask after the health of her sick father.<sup>276</sup> Conversely, the spectators are encouraged to either align themselves with, or at least feel concern for Rosa, who is presented as kindly and affable. Yet as the narrative develops, and the spectator is gradually informed of the experiences that drive María's antagonistic behaviour and self-destructive ways, her attitude towards life and her mother become increasingly understandable. This is emphasised halfway through the film by two melodramatically inflected traumatic moments.

First, there is the sequence by the train tracks where we snatch glimpses of María breaking down after having an argument with Juan about keeping the baby. She seems to see her future self in the bag lady at the other side of the tracks: like the oncoming train this is a future that seems to be closing in on María. The sense of impending doom is stressed by tense non-diegetic string music accented by diegetic warning blasts on the train's horn. As she stares at the bag lady, María begins to hyperventilate. The static head and shoulders shot is however interrupted by the wagons of the passing train, which periodically black out the screen, obscuring her from view. This works like a form of diegetic editing, with Zambrano using a mundane occurrence, naturalistically shot, to heighten the emotional impact, thereby striking a particularly compelling balance between the melodramatic and the realistic.

The second traumatic moment is set later the same day after María has tried to drown her sorrows in the local bar and is escorted back to her flat by the bar's owner El Gordo (Miguel Alcívar). After an abusive exchange with her mother, María falls over in the kitchen while trying to serve herself another drink. A high angle shot looks down at her sprawled across the floor, an image that stresses to both the spectator and

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<sup>276</sup> Smith (2001: 56).

her mother the seriousness of her alcohol problem. This is followed by a subdued but poignant series shot-reverse-shots as María, now lying in bed, observes her mother through a partially opened door as Rosa literally and metaphorically clears up after the storm. Sombre lighting and the slow repetition of one of the film's sad musical motifs played on the piano only, work to deepen the sense of despair expressed by María's muted sobs.

Using Peter Brooks's term these climatic moments and extreme situations could be read as melodramatic "texts of muteness", where "other registers of the sign" such as inarticulate cries and gestures are required, because words are not enough to express repressed meanings and messages.<sup>277</sup> Together these sequences act as an important breaking and turning point for the protagonist and allow the spectator to see, albeit briefly, the depth of the emotional pain and fragility behind María's surly exterior. In these sequences, especially the latter, she is presented not so much as a woman but as a frightened little girl, who has first been damaged by her upbringing and who now, unable to see a way of improving her lot in life, hurts herself. Rosa's submission to the rule of the father/husband becomes increasingly frustrating and incomprehensible in view of the severity of this damage. At the same time, the spectator comes to hope for an ending for María that will break with the patriarchal status quo and give her a chance to heal.

As in the sequence described above, the history of emotional estrangement and break down in communication between María and Rosa is given visual expression through composition and framing, and emphasised with lighting and coloured filters. For example, mother and daughter repeatedly appear isolated or separated from each other by doorways, walls and windows, or in two shots they are placed at opposite

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<sup>277</sup> Brooks (1995: 56).

extremes of the frame. Moreover, in many sequences María is shown as being almost continuously on the move, both within the frame and out of it. Indeed, the sound of María's footsteps as she leaves her mother and the flat become an aural motif, repeated on several occasions, that accompanies images of Rosa left alone in the frame. This constant movement around and away from Rosa echoes María's attempts to distance herself from the model of womanhood her mother represents and serves to challenge the mother – daughter bond so often taken for granted. It is implied that even when the two women are together they continue, as the title suggests, to be alone. Moreover, this painful "aloneness" takes on a deeper resonance precisely because it is experienced not, as might be expected at the turn of the twenty-first century, in the anonymous public spaces of circulation and consumption, but rather within the intimate spaces of family relationships and home, both conventionally associated with physical and emotional shelter and companionship.

Young suggests that home "does not fix identity, but anchors it in physical being that makes a continuity between past and present".<sup>278</sup> The home, in this case, is María's flat, a markedly unhomely or *unheimlich* domestic space that, like her relationship with her mother, is mediated by the spectre of The Traditional Family that she is trying to escape. In classic melodramatic fashion María's excess emotions of anger and pain are channelled into aspects of the *mise-en-scène* and soundtrack that launch an attack on the spectator's senses. A melancholic non-diegetic melody in a minor key sets the tone as María's flat is presented as cold and unwelcoming. A blue filter and low-key lighting evoke a depressing feeling of confinement and restriction, while the spartan, makeshift appearance creates a sense of impersonal transience. As

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<sup>278</sup> Young (1997: 151).

at other moments in the film, Zambrano uses references to smells to add greater depth to the mise-en-scène.

- Rosa:        Está muy encerrado ¿no? Huele a humedad.  
María:      Huele ¡ni poco! ¡Apesta!  
Rosa:        ¿Por qué no abres la ventana?  
María:      ¿Para qué? El olor se impregna las paredes. Hasta yo apesto a humedad.

This stench brings with it powerful connotations of social and emotional poverty and neglect that saturate not only the flat but also María's very existence. In this way the painful memories of poverty, subjugation, and patriarchal violence in the family home that constantly haunt María seem to be expressed through her subsequent experience and interaction with domestic space. By avoiding any attachment to the flat that she rents, it could be argued that María is trying to disassociate herself from her own history for fear of replicating her unhappy childhood home or her mother's position within it. She has succeeded in escaping physically from her father's house yet the emotional baggage that she carries with her continues to permeate her living space and haunt her dreams.

María's understanding of home as an oppressive, claustrophobic space is best captured by mise-en-scène in the sequence in which Rosa tries to open the window in her daughter's bedroom only to find it has been bricked up [Still 5]. A poorly lit medium shot shows Rosa from behind as a featureless silhouette that provides a familiar but at the same time anonymous body onto which the experiences of millions of women can be projected. This moment is accompanied by a solo piano picking out the melody line of the sad orchestral tune already associated with Rosa's aloneness and vulnerability in the opening credits. It can be read as a compelling statement

about the individual woman, Rosa, and the collective, the many other women like her. The bare bricks where the window should be, physically and symbolically deny any possibility of communication with the outside world for women whose minds and bodies have traditionally been imprisoned within the feminine-coded space of home.

Just visible, hanging on the wall to the left of the bricked-up window, is a small triangular embroidery panel depicting the Madonna and Child. Although it is difficult to make out any details, this most iconic image of Motherhood is instantly recognisable. It serves to remind the spectator that although women's access to the public sphere has been restricted, men and patriarchal discourses, especially in the form of Catholic doctrine, have traditionally penetrated and influenced the domestic sphere, shaping family morals and ideas of how women should behave. By comparison with her daughter, Rosa is cast in the mould of the Francoist role models of the ever-diligent Saint Teresa of Ávila, the supposedly self-sacrificing Isabel la Católica and the morally pure Virgin Mary.<sup>279</sup>

The figures of the Madonna and the baby Jesus reappear later in the film but as part of a *belén* placed inside an old television set that Rosa discovers in María's living room, significantly obscured by a dark cloth. Switching the television on activates a mass of flashing coloured lights that illuminate this nativity scene. The holy family, despite being in the foreground, blends into the busy detail of the scene, which includes the three wise men, shepherds, a selection of farmyard animals and a castle. The latter, together with the gaudy lighting, present the holy family, and by extension the ideologies of The Traditional Family and Motherhood that it informs, with the staged illusory air of a fairground sideshow or a kitsch fairy tale. This illustrates the mythic or romantic quality of the holy family, presided over by the patriarch but with

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<sup>279</sup> See Graham (1995b: 184-185), Morcillo (2000: 36-42) and Richmond (2003: 40).

the mother and child as the object of adoration. Moreover, it is a static model [social construction] that recreates the past within a physical and cultural space [the television] that the spectator usually associates with dynamic images that move with the times and bring the outside world into the home.

For Rosa, who is shown smiling contentedly at it, the *belén* and the family/motherly ideals that it represents seem to be like comfortable friends that keep her company during the evenings she spends alone in her daughter's flat. However, for María, from whose optical and psychological point-of-view the spectator sees it for the second time, the viewing experience, like her attitude towards becoming a mother, is laced with ambiguity. The spectator has no way of knowing whether the *belén* is something María chose to bring to the flat, or found when she moved in. What is important is that it is just there, like the popular Catholic traditions it represents and the connotations of María's own name. A scene in which María suffers from 'morning' sickness at work, externalised evidence of the pregnancy she is keeping to herself, abruptly cuts to a shot in which the *belén* completely fills the screen [Still 6]. After a few seconds this cuts to a close-up of Rosa's hands resting on her knitting, and then to a long shot of the living room that reveals her asleep in the rocking chair and finally to a medium shot of María looking on, implying that it is her gaze we have been following. The melody that accompanies this series of shots is one that subsequently comes to be associated with the secret desires that the three protagonists' suppress both outwardly and within themselves. Siphoning excess emotion into the aural and visual this sequence hints that for María, these secret desires are to become a mother and to be reconciled with her own mother; longings that she struggles with and against throughout the film. In this respect it is significant

that this melody fades out precisely as María, after gazing at the *belén*, resists Rosa's attempts to 'mother' her:

Rosa:       ¿Quieres que te prepare algo de comer?  
 María:      No, me voy a acostar.  
 Rosa:       ¿Te caliento un poquito de leche?  
 María:      No.  
 Rosa:       Hija, tienes que alimentarte.  
 María:      ¡No sea pesada!

The same melody returns as María sits in the Health Centre waiting for her appointment to discuss having an abortion. Here she is confronted, not with the ideal represented by the nativity scene and Rosa, but with mothering experiences as lived by other mothers and daughters who may or may not fit this model, whether they are the nervous mother sitting next to her young daughter, who provokes the trace of a rare smile from María, or the pregnant teenaged daughter who seems happy despite her mother's conspicuous discomfort with the situation. This time the final notes of the melody correspond to the moment when, on entering the social worker's office, María passes the previous patient, a woman who looks like she has been the victim of severe domestic abuse. Typically of the film as a whole, positive or rewarding aspects of being a woman and/or a mother are continually made to co-exist on screen with more negative experiences and vice versa. The kind of mixed feelings this provokes in María are deftly captured again during the moments when she contemplates the photographs left for her by Rosa before her departure for the village. The three pictures that the camera dwells on for over ten seconds all show mother and daughter together, and draw another rare smile from María. They allude to the good memories that María suppresses along with the bad. Yet once again, the accompanying non-



diegetic music intertwines minor and major arpeggios that never reach a resolution: this hints at the darker memories of violence and fear that the smiles present in these images of domestic harmony only partly hide.

María and Rosa's relationship in *Solas*, like that between Pilar and Aurora in *Te doy mis ojos* discussed in the next chapter, is presented as being mediated by an absent father figure. This representative of an oppressive patriarchy is associated with the past, but continues to haunt both families and mother-daughter relationships in the present. Ironically, in attempting to build a new life not ruled by the patriarchal demands to nurture traditionally placed on women, María has come instead to emulate the destructive behaviour of her other role model, her father. She is already drinking too much and acting aggressively; her fear is that like him she might end up striking her child. At the same time, María is presented as being caught between wanting to reject The Mother and everything she represents, and finding herself recognising the value of the physical and emotional labour undertaken by her mother. It is to the issues surrounding the representation and recognition of women's mothering labour in *Solas* that the next section turns.

### **2.3 Retrieving Herstories of Women's Labour: Simple Nostalgia Trap or Reflective (Re)presentation?<sup>280</sup>**

After the final shot of *Solas* has faded to black, a dedication "A mi madre, a todas las madres" appears in the bottom right hand corner of the screen.<sup>281</sup> This small

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<sup>280</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary credits Morgan (1970) for the first printed use of the neologism "Herstory", a feminist reformulation of conventional historiography that tries to (re)write history from a woman's point-of-view or emphasising the often suppressed role of women. See Herbst (2001: 137-138).

<sup>281</sup> Only one month after the release of *Solas* in Spain Zambrano's dedication was echoed by that of Almodóvar at the end of *Todo sobre mi madre*: "A Bette Davis, Gena Rowland, Romy Schneider..."

yet bold statement underlines the film's commitment to celebrating mothers and the work of mothering traditionally undertaken by women. This is further reinforced by the Spanish version of Neneh Cherry's "Woman" that accompanies the closing credits. The song not only problematically ellides women and mothers, but also identifies the feminine exclusively with giving and suffering, and defiantly celebrates this. Zecchi has read this celebratory tone as an articulation of what she argues is the resurgence of pronatalist discourses in Spain during the nineties. Candyce Leonard, adopting a feminist approach, insists that "women cannot turn to the past, they have to turn to the future and create their own and unexpected image". She claims that *Solas* represents a troubling, backwards-looking celebration of Motherhood "as the single path towards self-identification or relieving loneliness" and claims that this poses a fundamental threat to "the sexual female, the working female and the independent female".<sup>282</sup> Although it is undoubtedly valid to question the way the film represents mothers, implicit in these negative conclusions is the imposition of a different model of womanhood that is equally prescriptive and fails to acknowledge or appreciate the diversity of women's experience.<sup>283</sup> Indeed, Young warns that negative valuations of homemaking can constitute a dangerous belittling and denigration of the experiences of the many women who devote or have devoted themselves to house and children "as a meaningful human project".<sup>284</sup> In this light, it may be argued that the labour undertaken by women as wives and mothers needs to be acknowledged as an important but usually underrepresented aspect of social history.

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A todas las actrices que han hecho de mujeres. A todas las mujeres que actúan. A los hombres que actúan y se convierten en mujeres. A todas las personas que quieren ser madres. A mi madre."

<sup>282</sup> Leonard (2004: 224 and 227).

<sup>283</sup> Commenting on this propensity of some feminists to replace one prescriptive regime with another Nina Baym writes: "'She must... she must... she must.' If that *she* is *me*, somebody (once again) is telling me what I "*must*" do to be a true woman, and that somebody is asserting (not incidentally) her own monopoly on truth as she does so. I've been here before" (1997: 292).

<sup>284</sup> Young (1997: 149). My italics. Note that Young uses the word *many* not *all*.

Griel Marcus has stated that “there are people who act and speak but whose gestures and words do not translate out of their moments”; these people become the “living dead” swept into “the dustbin of history”.<sup>285</sup> The latter, a phrase borrowed from Trotsky, has become “one of our terms for finality, for putting history behind us, where it seems to belong”.<sup>286</sup> The way Rosa has lived may seem irrelevant or even reprehensible to the modern world. However, Marcus goes on to suggest that history is cheapened and restricted by the casual leaving out or forceful exclusion of people, acts, and events, which often find their voice or bide their time in art works.<sup>287</sup>

Looking to Marcus’s work on the importance of recovering those stories and people consigned to “the dustbin of history”, this section suggests that *Solas* can be read, not as a call to chain women once again to the kitchen sink, but as part of a necessary and empowering process of recuperating or making visible alternative herstories. The manner in which the term herstories is employed here is not intended to universalise and thereby homogenise feminine experience. It refers instead to stories of women’s lives and labour omitted from the dominant narrative of (masculine) History or history, and that are often dismissed by feminists as reminders of past suffering and submission best forgotten by women wanting to look to the future. In this respect, *Solas* can be considered an important example of how *cine social* brings previously hidden or marginalised issues centre screen. Its realistic modes of representation ensure that women’s traditional labours are made visible and established as a serious issue, while its affective mode of address encourages the spectator’s imaginative engagement.

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<sup>285</sup> Marcus (1996: 17-18).

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

Writers and activists associated with second-wave feminism stressed the need for women to reject the roles of wife and mother and leave the (feminine-coded) home in favour of the (masculine-coded) public sphere.<sup>288</sup> The housewife was, and still is, considered by many to be a “figure of lack and boredom”, while the independent, working woman is seen as embodying “feminine fulfilment and self-actualisation”.<sup>289</sup> Certainly, it is undeniable that for some women, like the better-educated middle-class Pilar in *Te doy mis ojos*, entering the labour market may be a financially and psychologically liberating experience. Nevertheless, a stance that insists on the need for women to leave the domestic sphere and aspire to a career has subsequently attracted a great deal of criticism for over-generalising the experiences of women and for speaking from the ideological point-of-view of educated, middle-class, married white women.<sup>290</sup> It has been pointed out that the vast majority of women, who fall outside this relatively privileged select group, have always taken on some form of employment in the public sphere albeit usually in low-paid jobs. Graham notes that in the Spanish context, even during the dictatorship when work outside the domestic sphere was considered antithetical to the ideal of Womanhood promoted by the State, “the imperative of autarky meant women left their homes to work (and this included prostitution) so that their families could survive”.<sup>291</sup>

hooks’s contention that the approach of second-wave feminists like Betty Friedan ignored all those women who “knew from their experiences that work was neither personally fulfilling nor liberatory – that it was for the most part exploitative

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<sup>288</sup> See, for example, Elshtain (1982).

<sup>289</sup> Johnson and Lloyd (2004: 110).

<sup>290</sup> These arguments have been particularly persuasively expressed by black feminist bell hooks (1984). See also Carby (1982) and Hill Collins (1990: 43-66) and (1994).

<sup>291</sup> Graham (1995b: 192).

and dehumanizing”<sup>292</sup> is particularly relevant to the scenes in *Solas* that show María at work. As a poorly educated woman from the working class, the only job she has been able to secure is that of a cleaner in an upmarket conference centre. The repetitive, reproductive nature of this work is significant, especially when we consider that the labour of cleaners is only well done if it is unseen, and, as such, María’s work in the public sphere represents just another layer of “invisibilization”.<sup>293</sup> This is eloquently expressed when a group of smartly suited businessmen walk over the floor she has just polished as though her labour had no value and she did not exist. This provokes a physically and verbally violent outburst from her, predominantly shown using a long shot that displays the glossy middle-class surroundings that require her labour but help to render her invisible. María may have escaped from her father’s house but her working life does not afford her greater independence, rather, it is presented as a move from one patriarchal prison to another. The context may have changed but it is implied that the unequal power dynamics remain.

hooks’s observation also resonates in María’s notion that: “Las personas deberíamos de nacer dos veces, una rica y otra pobre. Para que los ricos sepan lo que es ser pobre y los pobres podamos disfrutar de la vida”. These words may remind spectators of Gloria’s (Victoria Abril) mantra (“los pobres son príncipes que tienen que reconquistar su reino”) learnt from her communist mother-in-law Julia (Pilar Bardem) in Agustín Díaz Yanes’s earlier *Nadie hablará de nosotras cuando hayamos muerto* (1995). A film whose title alone once again raises the spectre of women as the living dead, as in Marcus’s evocation of the “dustbin of history”, *Nadie hablará* bears

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<sup>292</sup> hooks (1984: 97).

<sup>293</sup> O’Shaughnessy (2007: 138) uses this term in reference to *Marie-Line* (Mehdi Charef, 2000: France) a film about a group of poorly paid indigenous workers and illegal immigrants who are cleaners in a shopping centre.

some striking resemblances to *Solas* in its representation of working class women. Both infer that exploitation starts even before women enter the workplace. Gloria is selected on the basis of her looks for a job interview as a telephonist for which all the women have been asked to wear red, but resorts to performing fellatio on the male interviewers when it becomes apparent they have no intention of employing her. The figure-hugging red dress Gloria wears for the interview has its blue counterpart in that worn by María in *Solas* when she goes out late at night to see a man about a job. Although not explicitly represented in *Solas* the connotations of sexual availability are nevertheless inscribed in the style of María's dress, which is far removed from the power suit in exactly the same shade of blue later worn by her (female) supervisor. In María's case, going out to work and the conscious use of her sexuality are not presented as being inherently liberatory, and do not make her any more visible as an individual subject.

After bidding farewell to Rosa in the hospital María returns to her flat and pours herself a whisky. As she stands sipping it, one of the plants that her mother bought during her stay captures her attention, prompting her to survey the rest of the living room. First a long take slowly closes in on her face as she looks around, then a point-of-view shot pans from left to right, following her gaze and her emotions as she takes in the other plants in their brightly painted pots and the rocking chair Rosa rescued from the street. These colourful, personal touches, signifiers of homeliness or a practical and emotional investment, have transformed what had been a cold and transient space [Still 7]. Now, bright natural lighting bathes the scene reinforcing the strength and warmth of this transformation, to borrow from Gordon it could be argued

that what the daughter finds is “*the shape described by her [mother's] absence*”.<sup>294</sup> It is a moment of illumination for María; it is as though she is seeing and truly appreciating for the first time the value of the physical and emotional labour undertaken by her mother and recognising it as an expression of love rather than obligation driven by internalised patriarchal oppression.

Through María, the spectator’s attention is drawn to the labour of mothering that is so often invisible in a society that takes it for granted. Just as patriarchal constructions of womanhood traditionally confined women within what was perceived to be their primary or natural role as mothers, so women have been inextricably linked to the home, the physical place and social space where most of the unpaid work of mothering is carried out. Linda McDowell claims that for women the home has alternatively been “a site of disenfranchisement, abuse and fulfilment”.<sup>295</sup> Until this point, María has been presented as only willing to associate the domestic sphere with disenfranchisement and abuse. However, the visibility of her mother’s labour within the context of her own home space awakens her appreciation of it and enables her to begin to understand how it might become a source of fulfilment and a site of self-expression.

Building on this, it is significant that *Solas* also places a focus on knitting, a homely pastime associated with women or (grand)mothers in particular and usually given little importance. Nevertheless, for Rosa knitting is presented as a means of entertainment and a creative expression of self. In the many scenes that show her sitting by her husband’s hospital bed she is often knitting; it seems that it gives her a means of escape even when she is under his domineering gaze. When she gives the

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<sup>294</sup> Gordon (1997: 6).

<sup>295</sup> McDowell (1999: 73), quoting Cara Mertes.

doctor the babygrow she has made for his daughter, the skill evident in its intricacy impresses him (Doctor: ¡Usted sí que tiene arte!), prompting him to ask her name in order to thank her properly. Until this point in the film, just twenty minutes from the end, she has only been named in relation to her family status (*madre* or *abuela*) or in accordance with her gender (*señora* or *mujer*). Consequently it is through her knitting, a feminine-coded activity, that she is acknowledged as a subject with her own identity. To recognise and discuss the potentially positive aspects of such labour is not to vindicate the patriarchal system in any way, but rather to consider, as the film does, how “domestic skills and crafts might be revalued as a challenge to a male-dominated value system”.<sup>296</sup>

Arguably, any celebratory representation of an aspect of a previous generation must engage to some extent with the retrospective mode of nostalgia. From the Greek *nostos*, return home, and *algia*, longing or yearning, nostalgia has been identified as an uncritical emotion that constitutes an anti-feminist impulse because it inevitably “looks back to the days when women’s place was in the home”.<sup>297</sup> Departing from just such an understanding of the term, Leonard accuses those who view *Solas* positively as having been fooled by what she perceives to be its dangerously deceptive nostalgia and sentimental spirit, and what she deems to be the recreation of María in the image of her self-sacrificing mother through the melodramatic happy ending.<sup>298</sup> However, as the analysis of Zambrano’s representational strategies in this and the previous section has shown, *Solas* could alternatively be viewed as what Kaplan terms a “resisting

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<sup>296</sup> Hollows (2006: 102).

<sup>297</sup> McDermott (2004: 261). For feminist scholarship on nostalgia being dangerous for women see Doane and Hodges (2001) and Greene (1991).

<sup>298</sup> Leonard (2004: 235 and 227).



maternal woman's film".<sup>299</sup> That is, it is a text that does not simply validate the patriarchal social structure, and recognises the oppression inherent in the female positions it represents. *Solas* raises moral and political issues "in its very narrative", a feature which Kaplan claims for "resisting" films;<sup>300</sup> it could be added that these issues are also addressed in its methods of representation. Moreover, this engagement works, at least in part, through the film's mobilisation of nostalgia in its more critical "reflective" form.

Useful here is Fred Davis's distinction between what he calls "restorative" or "simple" nostalgia and "reflective" nostalgia. He describes the former as the "subjective state which harbours the largely unexamined belief that THINGS WERE BETTER (MORE BEAUTIFUL) (HEALTHIER) (HAPPIER) (MORE CIVILIZED) (MORE EXCITING) *THEN THAN NOW*",<sup>301</sup> while Svetlana Boym adds that it "does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition".<sup>302</sup> By contrast, "reflective" nostalgia "does more than sentimentalize some past and censure, if only implicitly, some present", it works to challenge "the truth, accuracy, completeness, or representativeness of the nostalgic claim".<sup>303</sup> Sinead McDermott develops these definitions of reflective nostalgia further by suggesting that it responds to the longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed, "not by seeking to undo that loss, but by using it as an impetus to tell a different story".<sup>304</sup> María is not presented, as Leonard suggests, as re-creating herself in the image of the mother from the

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<sup>299</sup> Kaplan (1992: 125).

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-126.

<sup>301</sup> Davis (1979: 18). Capitals and italics from the original.

<sup>302</sup> Boym (2001: xviii).

<sup>303</sup> Davis (1979: 21).

<sup>304</sup> McDermott (2004: 267).

*campo*,<sup>305</sup> but rather as re-creating herself in dialogue with her own experience and that of her mother. Reflective nostalgia, often expressed through non-diegetic music and the mise-en-scène, ensures that the film does tell a different herstory rather than become a simple nostalgia trap or a romanticised homage to the past.

*Solas* does not retrieve herstories that were trivialised in the past and are marginalised in the present as a means of suggesting that María should take her mother's life as an example. It is made clear that Rosa has lived a life indelibly marked by repressive patriarchal discourses, embodied by her unpleasant, possessive and often violent husband. However, the choices she has made and the creative power she has shown within these confines should not be ignored, because to do so is to reduce Rosa's, and countless other women's lives, to nothing. *Solas* is a much needed example of a film which re-examines the legacy of an older generation of mothers, or in the words of Gámez Fuentes, it re-evaluates "figuras desterradas (por olvido o simplificación) de la memoria oficial de la democracia".<sup>306</sup> *Solas* can be seen as an antidote to those feminist critiques that are so intent on rejecting patriarchal constructs of womanhood and motherhood that they end up throwing many women and mothers out with the bathwater.

## 2.4 Utopian (Re)creations of Family: Community and Compromise

There are those, especially amongst radical feminists, who have argued that family can only ever be understood or lived as a restrictive patriarchal, heterosexist ideal and see its outright rejection or abolition as the only viable form of progress.<sup>307</sup>

However, during the last decades of the twentieth century, most countries in the West

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<sup>305</sup> Leonard (2004: 227).

<sup>306</sup> Gámez Fuentes (2004: 168).

<sup>307</sup> See, for example, de Beauvoir (1953) or Firestone (1971).

have experienced, to varying degrees, what Weeks has called “the democratisation of intimate life”. That is to say that societies have seen the disassociation of sexual activity from marriage and reproduction, of marriage from parenting and heterosexuality and vice versa.<sup>308</sup> At the same time it is possible to discern, as explored in relation to Spain in section 0.2.4 of the introduction, the emergence of new ways of thinking and talking about family that break with tradition while remaining in dialogue with the past. This section examines the utopian ending to *Solas* in order to consider how the film engages with and/or contributes to developing understandings of family.

Most of *Solas*, as the previous two sections have discussed, focuses on the negative aspects of The Traditional Family and the oppressive patriarchal demands it placed on women. At the same time, the film also establishes the strength of the human need for companionship, for someone with whom to share the practical and emotional burdens of daily life, functions conventionally associated with family. This is played out first in the brief relationship between Rosa and Don Emilio. Don Emilio is totally without family: he is a widower whose only son died young. He came to the south from Asturias, and now no longer has contacts with his place of origin, nor a support network where he lives. He is desperately in need of both companionship and practical help, but when Rosa suggests he go into a home, he resolutely resists the idea of institutionalised care. María’s suggestion that he employ a maid is also rejected: paid help seems to him cold and unappealing. Instead, his ideal is of freely given, mutual companionship and support, providing a foil for María’s cynicism as regards relationships. Therefore, although Don Emilio offers both Rosa and María money, this cannot be read as a return to the patriarchal breadwinner ‘buying’ a

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<sup>308</sup> Weeks (2007: 8).

woman's services and/or uncritical obedience. He is not seeking to set up a hierarchical relationship, but rather offering financial security as just one possible aspect of a project in shared living. What is important to him is not merely finding someone to care for him, but finding someone he can care for and about in his turn. For example, Don Emilio lends Rosa money in the supermarket, she reciprocates by cooking for him and looking after him when he gets sick, he then reciprocates by offering financial, practical and emotional support to María, who reciprocates by allowing him to play a role in her life and the life of her child.

Don Emilio simultaneously provides a contrast both to María's abusive father and to her partner Juan. Juan is also willing to give María money, but as an easy way of dispensing with his obligations towards her and their unborn child. He is all in favour of an abortion to avoid "complicaciones", but has no intention of offering her emotional support during the process. Although he is much younger than Don Emilio, Juan delivers a whole series of cutting remarks that reveal an unquestioning acceptance of traditional views on 'good' Motherhood and Womanhood: "para ser madre hace falta ser una mujer de una vez y tú solo eres media mujer porque la otra mitad está alcoholizada"; "un hijo no es capricho de un día"; "el error es tener una madre como tú". As far as he is concerned there is only one option open to María: abortion, because she does not conform to his fixed understanding of Motherhood. Dialogue between them is therefore impossible. Don Emilio is against abortion, however he is willing put his "principios" to one side to support María by accompanying her to the clinic if she decides to go ahead with a termination. Unlike Juan he encourages her to talk through her hopes and fears, treating her as an individual rather than judging her against an ideal.

Notably, the family that María creates with Rosa (daughter) and Don Emilio is similarly based around dialogue and compromise, as she explains in the epistolary voice-over at the end of the film:

María: ...y no sólo es abuelo, además *es un padre para mí aunque discutimos mucho*, los dos somos igual de cabezones *pero al final acabamos de entendernos*. Por cierto, quiere que vengamos a vivir al campo, dice que sería mejor para la niña, está dispuesto a vender su piso y *arreglar nuestra vieja casa*.<sup>309</sup>

Here Don Emilio is presented, quite unequivocally, as a father to María, despite the loaded nature of the term. A father with whom one can regularly disagree, and yet still live in harmony is, however, by no means a reincarnation of the inequality of traditional patriarchy. Although María mentions that they may go back to live in the parental home in the country, at Don Emilio's suggestion, this potential move would also represent a (re)creation or (re)invention rather than regression. María's words capture the continuing presence of the past ("nuestra *vieja casa*"), but also refer to its transformation ("arreglar"). The house would contain good and bad memories, but what is important is that it would have changed.

This move (back) to the country remains however at the level of a suggestion, reported second-hand in an address to the dead: although it is an option for the future, it is by no means decided. This is important to note when discussing the depiction of the city versus the country in *Solas*. Although, as discussed above, the film is not simplistically nostalgic about The Traditional Family, it could be considered to verge at points on restorative nostalgia as regards the ideals of old-fashioned, rural

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<sup>309</sup> My italics.

community.<sup>310</sup> Rosa, arriving fresh from the *pueblo*, explains her support for Don Emilio simply in terms of helping a neighbour because that is what neighbours do for each other. María, by contrast, inhabits an anonymous urban landscape, characterised by isolation, individualism and the breakdown in community that that implies; as she explains to Don Emilio, in the city “uno no tiene con quien desahogarse”. The city is a contradictory space with gleaming new hospitals and efficient public transport alongside urban deprivation. The *pueblo* is never explicitly represented, and remains almost entirely an off-screen space. However, what the spectator learns about Rosa’s circumstances there indicate that life in a rural backwater presents different but equally troubling forms of isolation. As is Rosa unable to read and does not have access to a telephone, her ability and opportunities to communicate with anyone outside the village, including her children, are extremely limited. Both city and country, therefore, are presented as imperfect, problematic spaces where mother and daughter are, as the film’s title indicates, equally alone/*solas*.

*Solas* is a film whose very title is bleak and uncompromising, and much of its content subsequently fulfils the expectations that this raises in the spectator. Nevertheless, it has an unexpectedly happy and reconciliatory ending. This is structured in two parts. In the first an overlap dissolve momentarily superimposes a head and shoulder shot of Rosa over a similar shot of Don Emilio [Still 8]. He has just given thanks that he is living to see another day, whereas Rosa sits silently, her eyes gradually closing and a gentle smile crossing her lips. A cut to a long shot then shows her from behind sitting motionless in a rocking chair against a picturesque rural landscape; as so many times before the spectator sees Rosa in silhouette, however,

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<sup>310</sup> Leonard for example maintains that *Solas* presents a “heavy-handed association” of the city/María’s lifestyle “with evil” and the country/Rosa’s life “with virtue” (2004: 226).

this time she is illuminated by the sunrise that throws a magical halo of golden light around her entire figure. Therefore, although it is implied that she has passed away, her death is presented not only as painless and peaceful, but also almost as a transfiguration. Rosa's superimposition over Don Emilio moments before she seems to pass away and the warm light of the early morning that bathes both of them links them visually, suggesting an emotional and practical connection. Rosa's facial expression is tired yet strangely alert, as though she were aware of Don Emilio's offer to help support María, and were letting go of life happy in the knowledge that they will care for each other.

The second part of the ending is lengthier and more explicit thanks to the accompanying voice-over. In marked contrast to the rest of the film the *mise-en-scène*, including the characters' appearance, is overtly attractive and optimistic as Don Emilio, María and her baby daughter, an embodiment of *The Postmodern Family*, visit the cemetery where Rosa and her husband have been laid to rest [Still 9]. María places a bunch of red roses in her mother's memorial vase and then takes out a single rose for her father. This last gesture is conciliatory and seems to acknowledge the role, albeit emotionally and intellectually limited, that her father played in her life. However, it also makes apparent the vastly different degrees of gratitude and affection she feels towards her parents. The camera gradually tracks up to show the threesome from above and the screen fades to black as they walk slowly through the cemetery towards the gates. Throughout this sequence, the spectator hears María's voice as she reads the letter addressed to her mother, describing her new life with Don Emilio and the baby. She concludes by telling her mother how much she misses her, thereby articulating that which she seemed unable say during the rest of the narrative.

Much of the negative criticism levelled at *Solas* stems from this final sequence in the cemetery and this ‘happy ending’ that has been deemed to be aesthetically hypocritical and emotionally false. Some have claimed it presents an ideologically suspect shift away from the realist mode of representation that dominates the film up to this point.<sup>311</sup> Losilla, for example, argues that *Solas* sets out a realist agenda, only to degenerate into superficiality and cliché, “el territorio de la retórica y el melodrama casi folletinesco, fatalmente opuesto al despojamiento que, a trancas y barrancas, había querido mostrar el film hasta ese instante”.<sup>312</sup> He adds that this “slip” into an emotional ending endangers the spectator’s critical capacity to interpret the images shown. However, such dismissive judgements fail to engage in depth, either with the actual details of the final scenes and their potential for ambiguity, or with the socio-political potential of the melodramatic sensibility evident throughout the film. By mixing expressive modes, the film arguably avoids fulfilling anyone’s expectations, either those of the critics or the audiences, thereby ensuring heightened impact. Jane Shattuc reminds us that historically melodrama has been a major site of the struggle for the disempowered, and argues the political power of melodramatic texts lies in “the pleasure of tears [...] rather than the policing effect of intellectual distance”.<sup>313</sup> In this context, *Solas*’s denouement could be read as less of a careless “slip” into cliché, an aesthetic let-down or trick and more as a thought-provoking challenge to the hegemony of The Traditional Family and the symbolic working out of trauma for those disempowered by it. The rosy tone of the final sequence, so out of character

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<sup>311</sup> For criticism of the final sequence see Guerin [accessed 19.6.07], Holden (2000), Holman (2001), Leonard (2004), Losilla (1999) [accessed 10.11.08], TCh (1999) [accessed 19.6.07], Zecchi (2005) and Empire Anonymous [accessed 16.12.07].

<sup>312</sup> Losilla (1999) [accessed 10.11.08].

<sup>313</sup> Shattuc (1994: 149).



with much of the rest of the film, could also be understood as a powerful means of confronting the spectator with *The Postmodern Family* as an utopian solution.

The final sequence at the cemetery was not part of the original script, but was added later by Zambrano after a “diálogo creativo” with the producer Antonio P. Pérez of Maestranza Films. One can conjecture that Pérez was concerned about trying to sell a film with a harsher more pessimistic ending.<sup>314</sup> However what is interesting is that it was this more utopian version of the film that was so popular in Spain and around the world, thus taking its representation of an alternative, *Postmodern Family* to a large audience. Seen in this light not as inappropriate but rather as an affective and effective mixture of expressive modes, *Solas* exemplifies the flexible and subtle model of melodrama infused with a realist aesthetic being developed in contemporary Spanish cinema that have been able to combine appeal at the box office with social engagement.

Moreover, although the final sequence in the cemetery may be more positive in tone than much of the rest of the film, it still does not offer the viewer total closure and importantly leaves room for ambiguity, choice and change. María may have chosen to have her baby and to accept Don Emilio’s offer, but, as she explains in the epistolary voice-over, she has not left her job, suggesting that she retains a degree of financial independence. She seems to have found a degree of emotional healing, but her story has only come to a provisional conclusion. Don Emilio’s advanced age is stressed, reminding the spectator that this alternative family idyll could come to an abrupt end with his death. María’s ‘pairing’ with Don Emilio is unconventional and asexual, while her chances for forming a satisfactory sexual relationship with other men in the future are left open. The film also resists closure as regards the older

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<sup>314</sup> See del Pino (2003: 16).

generation: María's parents may be gone at the end, maybe suggesting that old-style models of father and mother have to die to release the younger generation, but Don Emilio is still there, with a stake in the future, yet remains strongly identified with Rosa. He can be read as proof that a link with the past need not be conservative or regressive. The ending of *Solas* is therefore more about compromise and considering various ways of moving forward towards The Postmodern Family rather than facile closure or an uncritical return to The Traditional Family.

Don Emilio is one of a number of caring male characters who have become increasingly common in recent Spanish films, either taking over where traditional mothers have left off, or taking on a fairer share of the nurturing work associated with mothering. As Silva reminds us "motherhood is female", while the labour of caring for and about others implied by the experiences, practices or act of mothering need not be.<sup>315</sup> Another particularly striking example can be found in Almodóvar's *Todo sobre mi madre*, which came out in the same year as *Solas*. The characters of Sister Rosa (Penélope Cruz) and her mother (Rosa María Sardà) show that women who have the capacity to give birth will not necessarily be willing, comfortable, or able to translate this into mothering. Yet transsexual La Agrado (Antonia San Juan), although not biologically able to become a mother, is nevertheless presented as demonstrating excellent mothering skills in her job as Huma Rojo's (Marisa Paredes) personal assistant.<sup>316</sup> Therefore, although Don Emilio and La Agrado have very little else in common they perform a similar narrative function, and point to the potential diversity of The Postmodern Family.

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<sup>315</sup> Silva (1996: 12).

<sup>316</sup> Other examples in this thesis include Pedro in *Cachorro*, Damián in *Flores de otro mundo* and Curro in *Poniente*, to which we might add the even more recent examples, Serafín (Ernesto Alterio) in *Semen, una historia de amor* (Daniela Féjerman and Inés París, 2005) and Nicolás (Ricardo Darín) in *La educación de las hadas* (José Luis Cuerda, 2006).

## 2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has already considered at length how *Solas* aims to recuperate the Rosas of Spain, the “living dead” who, doubly erased by their gender and class in their youth, are being erased again in their old age because the way in which they represent Motherhood is out of step with the times. Meanwhile, despite being acutely conscious of wanting not to make the same “mistakes” as their mothers, many of the Mariás of Spain are also left outside history or, at best, appear at its margins as statistics about the informal economy.<sup>317</sup> In *Solas*, both are retrieved from the dustbin and given visibility and a voice, as Zambrano tries to trace the shapes described by their absence from history.

In representing the ambiguities of mothering and María’s matrophobia, *Solas* explores the complex relationship between a younger generation of women damaged by the abuses of The Father and The Traditional Family, and an older generation of women they hold partly responsible for its oppressive perpetuation. Faced with the decision of whether or not to keep her baby, María has to confront the family past that continues to haunt her and her own attitudes to mothering. Anne Fogarty’s analysis of the development of mother-daughter relationships in contemporary Irish fiction can be fruitfully applied to María’s development over the course of the film, as she moves from “the silencing and negation of the mother’s point of view”, to “explor[ing] the multiple points of connection” she might share with the older generation.<sup>318</sup> María gradually comes to realise that she can learn from her mother without becoming her or subscribing to the traditional model of Womanhood she represents. Her decision to

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<sup>317</sup> Despite the mass integration of women into the job market in Spain statistics show that relative to their male counterparts the work that they take on is more likely to be located within the “informal” or “underground” economy. Often not regulated by labour legislation this work tends to be seasonal or temporary and poorly paid. See Cousins (2005b: 170-176).

<sup>318</sup> Fogarty (2002: 89).

keep her baby can be seen in this context, not as facile pronatalism, that naïvely reproduces The Traditional Family, but rather as part of a holistic renegotiation of self, along the lines suggested by Pilar Rahola: “donde la maternidad es una puerta abierta, una elección, la mujer empieza a ser un ser humano”.<sup>319</sup> In this context, the fact that María names her daughter Rosa after her mother does not imply a nostalgic resoration of the old but a reflective move towards the new that, at the same time, acknowledges and values aspects of what came before.

It is the melodramatic aspects in *Solas* that can be read as acknowledging past sacrifices and also emphasise the need to lay to rest this past, captured quite literally in the film by the affectively charged cemetery scene. However, rather than choosing to work in either the realist or melodramatic mode, Zambrano combines aspects from both in *Solas*. In doing this he opens up possibilities for dialogue across a range of the instantly recognisable elements of these two traditions. This combination of realist aesthetics and an affective mode of address and representation that could be seen to characterise *cine social*, or what Quintana has disparagingly described as “realismo tímido”,<sup>320</sup> might be more helpfully understood here as ‘flexible’ or ‘social melodrama’. Indeed, it could be argued that this blending of expressive modes is far from timid, and displays instead a laudable willingness to compromise in the interests of getting across a message that is at odds with the contemporary obsession with preserving The Traditional Family at all costs. The films discussed in the chapters to come all, to a greater or lesser degree, adopt a similarly flexible approach to modes of representation. They all seem to position the spectator with regards to a particular

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<sup>319</sup> Rahola (2000: 157).

<sup>320</sup> Quintana (2006: 279-283). See the section on *cine social* in the Introduction for a brief discussion of this term.

postmodern ideology of family; however the very range of methods they employ not only leaves space for critical reflection, but also actively invites it.

## CHAPTER THREE

### TAKING THE ROMANCE OUT OF THE FAMILY: MARRIAGE, MASCULINITY AND POWER IN ICÍAR BOLLAÍN'S *TE DOY MIS OJOS* (2003)

“No se trata de controlar, se trata de tener confianza”

Terapeuta: *Te doy mis ojos*

#### 3.1 Introduction

Based on her earlier short film *Amores que matan* (2000) director Icíar Bollaín's critically acclaimed *Te doy mis ojos* (henceforth *Te doy*) tells the story of a family dealing, or perhaps more appropriately failing to deal, with domestic violence.<sup>321</sup> Antonio (Luis Tosar) and Pilar (Laia Marull) have been married for nearly ten years; he works in his family's domestic appliance shop, while she is a housewife. Antonio claims to love Pilar, yet he is unable or unwilling to stop himself from verbally and physically abusing her. The film opens with Pilar fleeing the marital home late at night with their son Juan (Nicolás Fernández Luna) and seeking refuge with her younger sister Ana (Candela Peña). On finding out the reason for Pilar's flight Ana persuades her sister to remain with her and her Scottish boyfriend John (David Mooney) and encourages her to become more independent by helping her find a job. Their old-fashioned mother Aurora (Rosa María Sardà) is seemingly blind to the gravity of Pilar's situation and encourages her to work things out with Antonio.

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<sup>321</sup> Described by Bollaín as a “falso documental” *Amores que matan* was a short film commissioned by Canal+ España, which co-produced it with Producciones La Iguana. It was broadcast in Spain by Canal+ in May and June 2000. It was also shown on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2001 as part of “Malos tratos”, an edition of TVE 2's long-running *La noche temática* (1995-present) initiative, alongside the television film *Life with Billy* (Paul Donovan, 1994: Canada) and the documentary *La huida de los inocentes* (director, date and nationality unknown).

Meanwhile Antonio tries to overcome his problems by joining a men's therapy group and Pilar, who still loves him and hopes he will change, eventually goes back to him, much to her sister's dismay. At first Antonio manages to control himself but he soon reverts to his old ways and it is not long before he attacks Pilar in such a way that she can never trust him again.

In *Te doy* Bollaín does not follow the familiar pattern of representing spousal domestic-abuse established in mainstream films like Pedro Costa's *Una casa en las afueras* (1995) or Jaume Balaguer's *Sólo mía* (2001), which only really tell the story and develop the character of the female victim. Indeed, with *Te doy* Bollaín and her co-scriptwriter Alicia Luna took a risk by eschewing standard characterisations of the male abuser as a one-dimensional psychopath with no redeeming features, creating instead a much more complex aggressor in order to interrogate and try to understand the possible causes of his behaviour. The result, the sum of detailed research and a prolonged writing period, is a very carefully constructed, character-driven film which resolutely denounces Antonio's violence but at the same time addresses the questions that plagued Bollaín and Luna: "¿Por qué no se habla de ellos? ¿Quiénes son estos hombres? ¿Por qué hacen tanto daño? Y si son ellos quienes agreden, ¿Por qué son ellas las que tienes que huir de sus casas, esconderse y ser tratadas psicológicamente?"<sup>322</sup>

Over the four years during which *Te doy* was conceived, created and released domestic violence was beginning to occupy an ever greater amount of column space in the Spanish dailies and was becoming widely discussed as one of the most pressing social issues facing Spain. Previously domestic violence had been considered "un delito invisible", a private matter to be resolved at home or, as saying goes, "las cosas

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<sup>322</sup> Bollaín (2003: 13). See also Luna (2003: 9-12), on the process of co-writing the script.

de familia, se arreglan en familia”. However, in the wake of, amongst other factors, the increased availability of statistics and studies, and consciousness-raising initiatives of women’s organisations and the Instituto de la Mujer, the issue of domestic violence was firmly pushed out into the public sphere.<sup>323</sup> Pledges to tackle the problem made during the 2000 general election campaign established it as a political concern, as Javier Arenas the General Secretary of the PP put it “un problema de Estado, un problema público y de toda la sociedad”.<sup>324</sup> *Te doy* was released at a time of debate driven by a sense of collective urgency for the legislation that finally took the form of the *Ley Orgánica 1/2004, de 28 de diciembre, de Medidas de Protección Integral contra la Violencia de Género*.<sup>325</sup> Media coverage, in terms of newspaper and television reports, has been the medium that has done most to break with the taboo by rendering the issue visible and provoking debate. However, a glance at a selection of the typical coverage domestic abuse incidents receive reveals a fascination with the gory details and/or becomes a matter of statistics.<sup>326</sup> While such reporting has an initial impact, in time, the public becomes numb to it and its repetition engenders indifference. This chapter argues that *Te doy*, by contrast, works through its modes of representation and address to rehumanise the issue and encourage not just debate, but also comprehension at a deeper level.

In the mainstream films mentioned above, murder, or the imminent threat of it, drives the narratives, pushing these domestic dramas towards the territory of the

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<sup>323</sup> See IM: Estadísticas (2008) [accessed 17.11.08] for statistics dating back to the 1980s, Gelles, Strauss and Steinmetz (1988), Caño (1995), Fisas (Ed.) (1998) and Lorente Acosta (2001) for academic studies on domestic violence; elmundo.es (2004) [accessed 17.12.07] and elpais.com (2002) [accessed 17.12.07] for samples of the treatment of the issue in the press; and IM (no date) [accessed 17.11.08] for details of awareness-raising media campaigns run between 1998 to 2004.

<sup>324</sup> EFE (1999) [accessed 21.2.05].

<sup>325</sup> See mujeresred (2005) [accessed 21.12.07] for an overview of the calls for such a law, and *Ley Orgánica 1/2004* [accessed 17.12.07] for the full text.

<sup>326</sup> See, for example, EFE (2003a) [accessed 21.12.07] and EFE (2003d) [accessed 21.12.07].



uncritical, voyeuristic thriller. Useful for considering the ramifications of this shift is Phyllis Frus's discussion of *Sleeping with the Enemy* (Joseph Ruben, 1991: USA), which she describes as typical of such thrillers in "demonizing the abuser, objectifying the woman, eroticizing the victim, and sensationalizing violence".<sup>327</sup> She adds that such sensationalization stylises the violence, which then "carries the risk of an aesthetic response, and this may desensitize viewers by making the pain seem unreal".<sup>328</sup> The stylised canted angle shots, dramatic lighting and rapid editing used in *Sólo mía* could be compared here with the intensely uncomfortable, naturally lit, long takes used in *Te doy*. Ironically some of the worst offenders in this exploitative thriller approach are the 'based on a true story' films, such as *Una casa en las afueras* and the television film *¿Dónde está?* (Juan Carlos Claver, 2004). These are tendencies that create a problematic fine line between representations of domestic violence and entertainment for entertainment's sake that "limit rather than enlarge discussion about power and violence", and entertainment used to examine the issue critically and/or challenge the social status quo.<sup>329</sup>

Commenting on the status of mainstream film as "an important source of our mythology about family violence", Frus notes that "they are apt to depict violence against women or children in their homes as abnormal, not as the everyday reality it is, and the men who beat or torment them as psychotic or in other ways deviant".<sup>330</sup> Moreover, the homes referred to here are significantly middle-class, raising the

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<sup>327</sup> Frus (2001: 237).

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 238. The celebrity status of the actresses may also have this effect. For example, the choice of well-known Julia Roberts in *Sleeping with the Enemy*, Jennifer López in *Enough* (Michael Apted, 2002: USA) and Paz Vega in *Sólo mía* allows the audience to gaze at the abused woman while also affording the degree of respite or distraction afforded by the familiarity of these actresses. Vega had by 2001 been a regular cast member in the first and second seasons of Telecinco's popular sitcom *7 vidas*. By contrast Laia Marull was relatively unknown in 2003 despite having won the Goya for Best New Actress in 2001 for her work in Miguel Hermoso's *Fugitivas* (2000).

<sup>329</sup> Kozol (1995: 663).

<sup>330</sup> Frus (2001: 227).

expectation that they are inhabited by families who embody The Neoconservative Family ideal. Conversely, in films like *Ladybird Ladybird* (Ken Loach, 1994: UK) and *Nil by Mouth* (Gary Oldman, 1997: UK) violence is presented as a disturbingly normal feature of family life.<sup>331</sup> Associated with social realism and national cinemas rather than the commercial mainstream these ‘slice of life’ or ‘dysfunctional family’ films work critically, and studiously avoid the kind of stylization of violence mentioned above.<sup>332</sup> Nevertheless, in their association of domestic abuse with marginalised, working-class families affected by poverty, alcohol and crime, they are arguably in danger of propagating an equally problematic stereotype by perpetuating the commonly held notion that violence within the home is a predominantly working-class problem.<sup>333</sup> *Te doy* strikes a balance between the two with its middle-class setting where Antonio’s violence is represented as abhorrent and yet all too much a normal part of everyday life.

Another way in which *Te doy* strikes a balance is between its socially committed, sometimes inquisitive and at others didactic, mode of address that has led to its categorisation as *cine social*, and its affecting mobilisation of characterisation and romance. Or, as Elvira Lindo has put it, *Te doy* is not just “un docudrama sobre la violencia, es algo mucho más complejo. Asombrosamente, hay amor en los personajes”.<sup>334</sup> Romance, used in *Te doy* to tell the seductive yet destructive love story between Pilar and Antonio, is most often perceived as an entertainment genre and/or

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<sup>331</sup> For a detailed discussion of these film see Hallam and Marshment (2000: 201-216).

<sup>332</sup> Also worth a mention here is Zambrano’s *Solas*, discussed in the previous chapter, and Daniel Calparsoro’s *Salto al vacío* (1995) a story of emotional and moral decay set against a backdrop of post-industrial deprivation in the Basque Country, which combines stylised representations of violence in the public sphere with brutally graphic depictions of violence within a working-class home.

<sup>333</sup> Just such an assumption about class and domestic violence is made by Hooper (2006: 138) without providing any supporting evidence.

<sup>334</sup> Lindo (2003) [accessed 14.2.09].

subsumed within the categories of the melodrama or the woman's film.<sup>335</sup> Wendy Kozol has warned that entertainment genres often reshape narratives "in ways that limit rather than enlarge discussion about power and violence".<sup>336</sup> Similarly Frus has argued that "what movies do best is render individual stories of particular families", but what they do not do is "tie woman battering as a widespread problem to the social fabric".<sup>337</sup> However, this chapter suggests that these are hazards of representing violence against women in the home that *Te doy* largely avoids. Bollaín and Luna may take an emotionally engaging intimate story as their starting point but, as the following sections argue, they blend this with other expressive modes and in doing so challenge wider ideological questions of uneven power relations between the sexes, inherent in Spanish society and its institutions.

### **3.2 Marriage: Loving Partnership or Living Hell?**

In Spain the institution of marriage has traditionally been a (heterosexual, patriarchal) union promoted and sanctioned by the Church and State as the only possible (biological and moral) basis of The Family. Originally conceived of in economic terms as a means to enhance or secure a family's wealth or status, it has tended to make women legally and financially dependent on men.<sup>338</sup> However, ideologies of marriage have shifted over time, and with the rise of companionate relationships it has increasingly come to be understood less as a business contract and more as an equal, emotionally stable partnership between two people who love each

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<sup>335</sup> Notably Susan Hayward's otherwise very comprehensive guide to key concepts in cinema does not have a separate entry on "romance" and only touches on it briefly in a section on "Melodrama and Women's Films" (2006: 236-248).

<sup>336</sup> Kozol (1995: 663).

<sup>337</sup> Frus (2001: 241).

<sup>338</sup> Segal (1983: 19).

other. In this sense marriage has increasingly become a symbolic public recognition of a private commitment rather than a key social institution that safeguards society. Nevertheless, for cultural conservatives it continues to be associated with respectable (heterosexual, monogamous) adult sexuality and responsible parenthood, and remains the “corner-stone of a stable and moral society”.<sup>339</sup> In these terms separation, divorce or cohabitation are seen as weakening The Neoconservative Family and are equated with a breakdown in values. *Te doy*, however, challenges this stance. In this section a focus is placed on modes of representation, mise-en-scène and the characters’ life stories, to consider how Pilar and Antonio’s relationship is compared and contrasted to those between secondary characters. This, in turn, allows us to attempt to read the film’s ideological stance towards marriage in relation to individuals and family.

As the narrative develops the spectator comes to draw parallels between Pilar’s marriage and that of her widowed mother, Aurora. The similarities raise questions: will Pilar, like her mother, simply put up with the situation “till death us do part”? Or will she make what is presented as the commonsense choice and leave her husband so that she no longer has to suffer? In this matter the spectator is encouraged to align themselves with the concern Ana feels for her sister, as suspicions of Antonio’s aggression are augmented and confirmed through her eyes and perception. Initially this is introduced through the subjective camerawork used to survey the aftermath of a violent episode, an optical encounter filtered through Ana as she is shown entering Pilar and Antonio’s flat. It is then developed through point-of-view and reaction shots that become increasingly emotionally charged when she finds and reads the *urgencias* reports about the injuries sustained by her sister. This evidence, in addition to the abject terror we have observed in Pilar, leads us to conclude, like Ana,

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<sup>339</sup> Weeks (2007: 168).

that the right thing to do would be for Pilar to leave Antonio. This shared conviction makes Pilar's refusal to consult a lawyer and her eventual return to Antonio all the more frustrating, but also allows the film to examine one of the most complex questions linked to spousal abuse: why do so many women stay? Through Pilar and Aurora's stories Bollaín and Luna are able to explore two of the many possible answers to this question, and also consider how this may be affected by generational factors.

The spectator is able to piece together the story of Aurora's married life from snippets of conversation, facial expressions and props (photographs). At Juan's birthday party a visual introduction to Aurora's dead husband is given through the photograph collage she is preparing to place on his grave. These are photographs arranged to (re)present The Family that will then, as it was with Alicia in *Familia*, be (re)affirmed by the gaze of an outsider: a harmonious public image revealed as a façade behind which unhappy truths can be hidden. In one of the photographs the husband is wearing an army uniform, an easy way in a modern day Spain haunted by Franco's military dictatorship of coding him as authoritarian and potentially violent. The photographs prompt a telling exchange between John, Pilar and Aurora from which it is inferred that the dead husband, if not violent, was nevertheless uncompromising and unpleasant to live with. Although very different in tone and plot importance the relationships between Pilar and her mother and Pilar and Antonio, like those between María and her mother and María and her boyfriend in *Solas*, are haunted by the father figure. In *Te doy* the parallels between Antonio and his father-in-law are tacitly stressed when Antonio, who unbeknownst to Pilar has been invited to his son's party by Aurora, then leaves early, an action repeated later in the film when together with Pilar and Juan he leaves Ana and John's wedding early. Yet it is

made clear that Aurora stayed with her husband until his death and even helped to nurse him through a long and difficult illness. Through her physical appearance and the conservative sentiments underlying many of her remarks, the spectator is able to speculate as to why she might have done this.

The first time we encounter Aurora she is visiting a cemetery with her daughters, and John and Juan, to tend to her husband's grave. Her immaculate make-up, perfectly coiffed hair and large fur coat immediately mark her out as concerned with outward appearances. While her question to Ana and John, "¿Vosotros pensáis casaros como Dios manda o de cualquier manera?", reveals that this concern extends to the formalities and rituals that surround social conventions and institutions, in this case, marriage. Aurora later reiterates this sentiment as she tries to persuade her youngest daughter to wear the dress Pilar got married in, "Mira Ana, ya que la ceremonia no es lo que tenía que ser, al menos ten unas fotos decentes". This sequence, shot on the roof terrace of Ana's building is shot in such a way that the immense presence of Spain's patriarchal Catholic tradition in the form of Toledo Cathedral appears behind Aurora and Pilar [Still 10]. Discussing the choice of location for *Te doy* Bollaín has commented that Toledo "contaba mejor que cualquier diálogo todo ese peso histórico, de tradición, de cultura que tenemos todos detrás, el papel del hombre, el de la mujer".<sup>340</sup> The blocking and dialogue in this sequence imply that Aurora belongs to, and Pilar, by example, is positioned in the shadow of, a generation socialised under Franco, who accepted the Church and State enforced tenets of Marriage and The Family as being sacred and therefore indissoluble, and the Catholic ideal of woman as selfless mother and wife.

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<sup>340</sup> Bollaín (2003: 27).

Aurora's dedication to convention and tradition that had earlier seemed absurdly comical when she asked John where he intended to be buried, takes on a more troubling and even tragic quality when she declares that Pilar should go back to Antonio because "Una mujer nunca está mejor sola". The spectator is left outraged by this reformulation of the popular wisdom of the saying "mejor solo que mal acompañado", a phrase that would be more appropriate in these circumstances. Armed with knowledge that corroborates Ana's list of Pilar's injuries the spectator is positioned to share the younger daughter's outrage at her mother's short-sightedness. Belonging to different times and a product of different values Aurora and her choice to stay married is presented as the tendency of an older generation of women in Spain to yield to convention, or to lack the courage to break with it. This is presented as a dangerous prizing of convention and a self-sacrificing model of womanhood over the physical and mental wellbeing of her own daughter. As in *Solas* it is partly the working through of anger directed at this model of women's submission and self-sacrifice that acts as a motor of change and allows the story to move on for a generation of daughters living its legacy. Indeed, when Pilar, coded like her mother as a subjugated woman, finally confronts her mother, Aurora's final reply "Yo no supe hacerlo mejor, hija. Inténtalo tú" points to the need for a new form of knowing and the imperative to action.

As discussed above it is inferred that Pilar's inaction or tolerance of an intolerable situation is, in part, explained by the model of womanhood she learnt from her mother. At the same time *Te doy* indicates that Pilar's generation does not face the same institutionalised legal, economic or social impediments to leave an abusive husband as their mothers did. Instead, Pilar theoretically belongs to a society and era characterised by an acceptance of the legalisation of divorce, and where financial

dependence should no longer be a major barrier in light of women's widespread incorporation into the workforce. On one hand the ease with which Pilar gets a job to support herself and her son could be seen to underplay what may, for many women, still be a significant reason for staying with their brutal husbands. On the other, it importantly presents economic dependence as a surmountable problem, although recognising that these women will require practical and moral support, such as that given to Pilar by her friends and sister. Minimising some of these, what might be called traditional impediments to leaving also allow the film to focus more on the exploration of the equally problematic issue of why women stay. Harnessing the power of the melodramatic sensibility and affective storytelling Bollaín and Luna choose to present the latter as a matter of love and hope. That is, the women's often self-destructive love for men, and the hope that their men will change their violent ways and go back to being the men they fell in love with. At the same time there is an attempt to understand the aggressors, who are represented as men who only know how to possess. It is interesting here that whenever Bollaín or Luna talk about their potentially problematic decision to focus on the love story between Pilar and Antonio, they nearly always emphasise the extended period of research that gave rise to this choice. In particular they stress their debt to the abused women whose stories they were able to listen to at a women's shelter in Toledo.<sup>341</sup> This tendency indicates their commitment to trying to tap into the real, while also conferring an emotional and psychological weight on their (re)presentation of the subject, a weight that is

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<sup>341</sup> See, for example, Luna (2003), Bollaín (2003), EFE (2003c) [accessed 14.2.09] and Ruiz Mantilla (2004a) [accessed 14.2.09].



significantly given a further degree of authority by the frequency with which both also mention the experts they consulted during their research.<sup>342</sup>

Pilar's love for Antonio is evidently not the blissful love of utopian happy endings but rather a destructive love that seems to blind and paralyse her, as she lets herself become little more than a mirror to Antonio. Ellen Armour suggests that male subjectivity has a tendency to draw on female resources for sustenance; "man's confidence in his status as subject is sustained through the woman's gaze, which reflects man as he would like to be".<sup>343</sup> This focus on the gaze, already introduced through the title, is also developed throughout the film. For example, in the tense sequence where Pilar and Antonio are first shown on screen together during which she uses the heavy old door to Ana's building to shield herself from him, Antonio tries to recapture her gaze and, with it, his control over her. A tightly framed close-up lasts for over half a minute as Antonio holds Pilar's face through the door's small viewing window pleading with her to look at him, "Mírame Pilar, mírame". Her facial expressions and body language stress the strength and nature of her fear but also imply her torment at shutting out the man she loves, yet in this instance she does not let him in, either physically or emotionally.

The extent of her love is represented through her physical and psychological willingness to "give" every part of her body to Antonio, as alluded to by the film's title, *Te doy mis ojos*, words that she utters to Antonio as they make love. Taken in the spirit of the love story between Pilar and Antonio, these words are part of an endearing game between lovers. But taken in the wider context of what is known about the couple's violent history we fear the more sinister and dangerous

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<sup>342</sup> This is particularly evident in Bollaín's audio commentary on the film available on the DVD released by Manga Films.

<sup>343</sup> Armour (2001: 318).

implications of such total surrender, described by Zecchi as a form of “symbolic self-mutilation”.<sup>344</sup> This is confirmed later after Pilar has returned home and Antonio has become jealous of her new found freedom when the motif of the gaze returns as a warning sign. First, losing his temper in the kitchen, Antonio grabs Pilar’s arm shouting “¡Mírame cuando te hablo!” and although here he stops himself in time, it is the reprise of this phrase that marks the beginning of his later horrific attack on Pilar. The imperative that was earlier inflected by a sense of loving contrition in the two later instances becomes an aggressive demand. Meanwhile, in trying to reflect a comforting image back at Antonio to bolster his low self-esteem, Pilar loses sight of who she is. It is only after she has told Antonio that she does not love him anymore and never will again that she is able to take back her eyes. As she says to Ana: “Tengo que verme. No sé... no sé quién soy. No sé quién soy. Hace demasiado tiempo que no me veo”. The formula of love plus marriage equals the perfect happy ending has been represented countless times across different genres and different mediums, *Te doy* subverts this expectation asking what should be done if love plus marriage equals a living hell instead. The message is clear; women beware of selflessness because marriage in the twenty-first century should be a commitment between equals.

The opening sequences of the film predispose the spectator to disliking and distrusting Antonio making it seem self-evident that Pilar should, as her sister suggests, “separarse y pedir una orden de alejamiento”. However the next half hour of the film is dedicated to detailing his efforts to change and to following the sometimes disarmingly tender love story between him and Pilar. Ana’s well-intentioned opinions, with which many spectators are likely to align themselves, are presented as commonsense and her practical help is shown to be a vital source of refuge for Pilar,

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<sup>344</sup> Zecchi (2006: 197).

yet notably they are largely ineffectual in extracting her sister from this abusive relationship. What for Ana, as for many external observers, may seem like a black and white problem with a straightforward answer is complicated for Pilar by her love for Antonio and his for her. This invites the bigger question of what love is and is not. However what is more important in trying to comprehend the couple's story is that they understand themselves to be in love, with all its positive connotations of tenderness, passion and devotion. This is made clear in the sequence in which Pilar, her face transformed by an excited smile, describes to Ana how Antonio proposed to her. Or in the following sequence where, when asked to think of something about Pilar he is fond of, Antonio formulates a perhaps surprisingly romantic answer, "el ruido [...] [Pilar] se mueve muy ligerita y hace muy poquito ruido y es como suyo ese ruido, ¿sabes? Y cuando está en casa, pues es que me quedo como atontado escuchándola". However, as in the sex scene described above, these moments may be romantic, but they also have a slightly disturbing edge, a combination and expectation already established by the film's theatrical trailer and poster/DVD cover. The red filter, used for the latter, creates an image that is simultaneously intimate yet oppressive, tender but threatening, and romantic yet dangerous.

This imminent danger is also expressed through Pilar and Antonio's back (love) story, which is presented as having followed the kind of cyclical pattern described by psychologist Leonore Walker in her "Cycle Theory of Violence". Walker divides the cycle into three phases, "(1) tension-building, (2) the acute battering incident, and (3) loving contrition", that provides "the positive reinforcement for remaining in the relationship".<sup>345</sup> This is a pattern that is uncannily

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<sup>345</sup> Walker (2000: 126 and 127). Walker's seminal work *The Battered Woman* (1979), where she introduced this theory, was the first concerted effort to try to understand why women remain in

only a slight distortion of the most basic romantic narrative of boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy regains girl; a successful formula repeated over and over in film. We sense that what started as a cycle has become a vicious circle or a seemingly neverending spiral fuelled both by Antonio's failure to convert remorse into real change and by Pilar's continuing hope that he will.

The plot of *Te doy* starts directly after what we assume was an acute battering incident. Subsequently the first half of the film is concerned with loving contrition, the secretive, conspiratorial quality of their initial meetings capturing some of the magic of lovers coming together against the odds. Meanwhile the progress Antonio seems to make leads us to hope against hope, like Pilar, that he really will change and in doing so might become the romantic hero who proves his worth and gets the girl. But when he does get the girl, when Pilar returns home with their son, it is not long before his resolve to change weakens, culminating in the attack that finally makes Pilar lose all hope. However, it is this that finally makes her break the cycle of abuse and allows the film's plot to diverge from the expected pattern of the characters' (self)destructive history.

*Te doy* is not only clear in its concern about women staying in violent or unhappy marriages, but also in the unquestioning acceptance of marriage as an institution or a moral standard. However, far from seeking its abolition, the film instead (re)presents marriage as a cultural construction that remains desirable and relevant when (re)imagined by the individuals, in particular the women, who enter into this commitment. In a positive move away from the model of womanhood based on self-sacrifice Ana is presented as an assertive, working woman, a change often

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abusive relationships for so long. Although incomprehensible to many the fact remains that many women either do not leave, or leave and then return to violent husbands/partners. See Gelles, Straus and Steinmetz (1988: 221-244), Allen and Baber (1992: 52-53) and Siann (1994: 150-177).

implicitly blamed for the declining marriage and birth rate in Spain. The film is explicit in putting forward the idea that neither Ana's behaviour nor her choices are incompatible with marriage. Indeed Ana and John's wedding, presented as a joyous and highly-personalised occasion, takes place exactly halfway through the film thereby, quite literally, forming its heart. The utopia of Ana and John's egalitarian relationship serves as a counterpoint to Pilar and Antonio's. It evokes what Giddens has termed the "pure relationship", which has come about with the democratisation of personal life and the accompanying revolution in ideologies of intimacy that have characterised the latter part of the twentieth century.<sup>346</sup> Moreover, it illustrates the point that Jane Lewis has made, that far from spelling the end of family or community "independent people can value personal growth, individuality, equality and morality that comes from within rather than one that is imposed from without, and yet still feel commitment to one another".<sup>347</sup> Ana and John's marriage is presented as a desirable model for intimate relationships in which the individuals continually negotiate the conditions of their association rather than adhering to predetermined conventions and power dynamics.

The comparison between the relationships the two sisters have with their partners is examined using editing, representations of space and photographic images. For example, in one sequence the pale light of day reveals to Ana the kind of destruction wrought by Antonio. Broken glass in the hallway and food spattered over tiles in the kitchen make her sister's flat look like a scene from a horror film. By contrast, Ana and John's kitchen is presented in the following sequence as a convivial and warmly lit space. One line of feminist thinking might consider any such positive

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<sup>346</sup> Giddens (1992: 188).

<sup>347</sup> Lewis (2001: 27).

representation of the kitchen [hearth] as the heart of the happy home as dangerously regressive because it has historically been “a locus and a symbol of feminine oppression”.<sup>348</sup> However, by showing Ana and John sharing the task of tidying up after dinner, traditional scenes of domestic harmony built upon the invisible labour of women are (re)imagined to present a more egalitarian ideal of domesticity for the twenty-first century. This utopian synthesis or marriage of tradition and innovation is also represented spatially in Ana and John’s home; a flat in Toledo’s historic centre located in an old building that looks as though it has barely changed in centuries from the outside, but that has a contemporary feel on the inside. Conversely although Pilar and Antonio live in a flat in an *urbanización* on the outskirts of Toledo, clearly coded as new and modern, the scenes that are played out within its walls reaffirm old inequalities.

Another striking juxtaposition of the sisters’ intimate relationships comes in the form of the manifest differences between the wedding photographs of the two couples displayed by their mother on their father’s grave [Still 11]. Seen from Pilar’s point-of-view, both optical and psychological, the two photographs appear as though in a ‘spot the difference’ competition at a point in the film where the internal dynamics of both marriages have been examined. Pilar and Antonio look the part, formally posed in their traditional attire yet they appear strangely disconnected as they hold hands but solemnly stare out in different directions. By contrast Ana and John’s photograph is informal and fun; they grin broadly at the camera as the bride, who is symbolically wearing the trousers, cheekily lifts up her groom’s skirt (kilt). Weeks has suggested that this kind of shift is best understood as a detraditionalization of inherited patterns. He argues that increasingly people are working out their family

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<sup>348</sup> Freeman (2004: 7).

lives “with reference to everyday contexts and networks rather than following normative ideas that operate at the national level”, and yet are “clearly deploying values of reciprocity and care that are rooted in their specific social and moral worlds”.<sup>349</sup> Like the relationships they represent Pilar and Antonio’s photograph simply replicates the norm of the traditional conjugal image, while Ana and John’s combines marriage with personal expression.

The living arrangements of another of the film’s strong women, Rosa, represent an emerging alternative to marriage or cohabitation that is slowly becoming increasingly common. Of her own volition Rosa is part of what has become known as a living-apart-together (LAT) couple.<sup>350</sup> Presented as a well-educated, successful, independent (middle-class) woman, Rosa has a good relationship with a male lover but chooses not to share her home with him, because, as she puts it, “que las camisas se las planche él, y que me lleve al cine”. The inclusion of this lifestyle choice in *Te doy* provides a means for the spectator to imagine a different balance between the genders, in which women work, rather than keep house for a man and ‘repay’ him for his economic support by being sexually available to him.

The romance between Pilar and Antonio helps to involve the spectator in a manner that fosters understanding rather than justified but unhelpful condemnation. It encourages the spectator momentarily to share Pilar’s hope, thereby raising expectations, and making Antonio’s cowardly relapse all the more frustrating as we feel that he has not only failed himself, Pilar and their son, but also us as spectators. In its representation of dysfunctional traditional marriages *Te doy* positions the spectator to reject marriage as automatically guaranteeing moral and social stability. Indeed,

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<sup>349</sup> Weeks (2007: 170).

<sup>350</sup> On LAT couples see Trost and Levin (2005: 357-359).

implicit in the film's ideological project is the notion that sometimes the wellbeing of individual family members may be better safeguarded through the dissolution of marriage. *Te doy* also addresses anxiety about the survival and future of marriage in light of the ever-increasing individualism deemed to characterise contemporary society. Individualism, understood as the kind of (selfish) pursuit of self-realisation and self-fulfilment, can be deemed mutually exclusive to the altruism often associated with marriage as an institution. However, in *Te doy* a degree of individualism is presented as a necessary component of healthy interpersonal relationships. Ana and John reimagine and revitalise marriage through personalisation, while Rosa's less conventional lifestyle choice is represented positively as an equally valid option. Just like appearances, marriage, when it is taken for granted or when it masks inequalities, is presented as deceiving. *Te doy* eloquently expresses this through images of Pilar and Antonio's wedding photograph that appears at several moments in the narrative that disrupt its connotation of the happily ever after. This is further reinforced by Pilar's sudden melodramatic outburst on her sister's roof terrace in which she screams at her mother and sister and then flings her wedding dress off the building. The subsequent silent focus for a full five seconds on the image of Pilar's wedding dress hanging perilously from wires high above the street functions as another powerful text of muteness that pierces her repressed emotions and make a profound statement on the precarious future of the institution of marriage in its traditional form [Still 12]. The film's exploration of Pilar's marriage is clear in its ultimate message: women must help themselves by learning from the mistakes of previous generations and recognising that they have the choice to stay or leave.



### 3.3 Masculinity under Scrutiny

In contrast to a fascination with mothers in Spanish cinema and the wealth of associated critical literature, the figure of the father/husband has received only fleeting mentions. The focus in scholarly writing on representations of women, mothers and femininity in Spanish film, which this thesis examined in the previous chapter, has formed an important part in redressing the gender inequalities of a traditionally male-centred culture. However, it may also have led to the balance tipping too far the other way with filmic representations of men, as fathers and husbands, receiving little attention from the academy, with the writing that does exist tending to be limited to stock observations about Spain's oppressive patriarchal past.<sup>351</sup> In an article on the subject of masculinities and film during the transition, Estrada persuasively argues that, after Franco's death, men in Spain were left with "neither a model to defy nor a model to follow".<sup>352</sup> Moreover, in an era when the influence of feminist thought and GLBT movements has discredited any uniform notion of masculinity, Western societies like Spain continue to fail to interrogate what it means to be a 'man' or a 'father' with any rigour. Just as the perceived destabilisation of The Neoconservative Family has led to talk of crisis, so a wide-scale break down in rigid perceptions of gender/sex identities and roles has contributed to the so-called "crisis in masculinity".<sup>353</sup> Paying particular attention to character development and horizons of expectations this section analyses the thought-provoking

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<sup>351</sup> Only Kinder (1993), Maroto Camino (2005) and Estrada (2006) focus some of their analysis on fathers. By comparison Fiddian (1989), Kinder (1993), Heins Walker (1998), Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas (1998: 131-133), Evans (1999), Deleyto (1999a) and (1999b), Gámez Fuentes (1999), (2000), (2001a), (2001b), (2003) and (2004), Herrero Vecino (2000), Dapena (2002), Martín Márquez (2002), Pino (2003), Donapetry (2004), Leonard (2004) and Zecchi (2005) have all written on the figure of the mother in Spanish film.

<sup>352</sup> Estrada, (2006: 266).

<sup>353</sup> See Horrocks (1994), Connell (1995) and Clare (2000). For a useful overview of the growing interest in this "crisis in masculinity" and its representation in Spanish cinema see Santaolalla (2003b: 154).

representation of masculinity in crisis portrayed in *Te doy* through the context of The Neoconservative Family.

As mentioned above, domestic violence films made in Spain have tended to feature one-dimensional male abusers. For example, Daniel (Juan Echanove) in *Una casa en las afueras* (1995) and Joaquín (Sergi López) in *Sólo mía* (2001) are made so evil that it seems like it is their destiny to be violent, while their psychopathic tendencies more or less exempt them from being responsible for their actions. As a result, both films largely reduce the issue of domestic violence to a simplistic struggle between good (women/wives) and evil (men/husbands). Although unwavering in its condemnation of domestic violence, *Te doy* simultaneously acknowledges, through the more multi-dimensional character development of Antonio, that condemnation alone will not help society to understand abusers or the family members who remain with them. What motivates Antonio's violence towards his wife is not initially apparent, and, as the film progresses it becomes increasingly clear that his behaviour is, at least in part, related to his low self-esteem and corresponding fear that what he provides for his wife and son, both in a material and intellectual sense, is somehow inadequate. Although in full-time employment, Antonio's job in the shop owned by his family is unchallenging and unrewarding. Repeatedly shown as a place where he is ordered around and demoralised by his more confident, better-qualified younger brother Andrés, the spectator comes to associate the shop and Andrés with Antonio's inferiority complex. As the plot develops this situation is identified as a trigger to violent incidents, as Antonio compensates for this public humiliation by emotionally and physically abusing his wife.

Gledhill argues that, although so often appealed to as a kind of gold standard in human representation, the psychologically rounded character produced by the

discourses of popular psychology, sociology, medicine, education and so on, is nevertheless as much a work of construction as the stereotype. She suggests that in these terms psychologically rounded characters can be understood as a kind of mechanism by which the protagonists of fiction “articulate with reality”.<sup>354</sup> Gledhill adds that the cultural significance of the complex illusion of such characters cannot be measured in any direct comparison with the real world, but rather “depends on how they are called on within the particular genres or narrative forms which use them, as well as on the circumstances of their production and receptions and on the social context of their audiences”.<sup>355</sup> In *Te doy* the complexity of Antonio’s character is used to represent him as an individual, who is believable and whose actions, in the context of Bollain’s socially committed mode of address, cannot be explained away by some inherent evil or as the product of a culture that has traditionally privileged men’s power over women. In this way the film positions the spectator to imagine that it is possible that “[t]odo hombre es una revolución interior pendiente”.<sup>356</sup> Moreover, by framing the development of Antonio’s character through his romance with Pilar that dominates the central section of the film and the almost documentary-like sessions with his therapist (Sergi Calleja) *Te doy* opens up a provocative dialogue between emotion and the masculine.

Through the stories of the men attending the therapy group *Te doy* presents the spectator with the horrors suffered by the women for whom marriage has certainly not led to the happily ever after. The words of one of the men (Antonio de la Torre) paints a picture of what his wife has to endure from a husband who believes marriage is the

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<sup>354</sup> Gledhill (1997: 346).

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 347.

<sup>356</sup> This is the motto that the pro-feminist Asociación de Hombres para la Igualdad de Género (AHIGE), formed in 2001, works towards. See AHIGE [accessed 23.5.07].

physical and sexual subordination of women. Read through the logic of universal human rights, represented in *Te doy* by the therapist whose status as a professional lends credence to this discourse, the relationships the men have with their wives bear greater resemblance to those of master and slave, or punter and prostitute, rather than married couple. As in *Familia*, when it is implied that Carmen, acting as the wife, is expected to fulfil her ‘conjugal duty’, we are reminded that in an era when marital rape is recognised and marriage is supposedly characterised by democracy, such demands are nothing short of abhorrent.

The therapy group sequences put into words and images the observation that there is no simple archetype of men who abuse; they can be of any class, uneducated or learned, young or old. As psychotherapist Luis Bonino states, “lo único que tienen en común es que son hombres y que tienen muy interiorizada la idea de que la mujer está a su disponibilidad”.<sup>357</sup> Antonio is represented in these terms, as wanting and needing to possess Pilar, who in turn gives him the respect and support that he does not get elsewhere. His perplexed look, when his therapist enquires as to whether he has ever asked Pilar for forgiveness, subtly implies that the interiorisation of this desire to possess hinders his capacity to see that he might be in the wrong. As Young has observed, traditionally the patriarchal gender system has allowed man “a subjectivity that depends on woman’s objectification and dereliction; he has a home at the expense of her homelessness, as she serves as the ground on which he builds”.<sup>358</sup> His desire, expressed in his insistence that Pilar returns to the marital home because it is “normal”, is enshrined in law in the form of marriage vows, as echoed in a sound bridge between the end of the sequence in which Pilar and Antonio make love at her

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<sup>357</sup> Quílez (2004) [accessed 23.5.07], quoting Luis Bonino.

<sup>358</sup> Young (1997: 138).

sister's flat and Ana and John's wedding ceremony. However, the inclusion of these marriage vows simultaneously serves to code Antonio's obvious failure to fulfil his duty to "socorrerse mutuamente" as not "normal". Antonio repeatedly appeals to 'normality' as a means of bending marriage to his own needs, bringing to mind the Foucauldian notion that "power is a question of disciplining people by indicating what is normal".<sup>359</sup> However, *Te doy* is explicit in pointing out that Antonio mistakes possession for normality:

- Antonio: Es que yo no quiero líos, cojones. Yo, yo lo único que quiero es una relación normal.
- Terapeuta: ¿Normal? ¿Y qué es una relación normal?
- Antonio: Pues lo normal, normal, en un matrimonio, no sé, que uno sepa dónde está el otro, qué hace y qué piensa.

While the traditional patriarchal ideal of marriage may have been about possession(s) in *Te doy* such a construction that may directly or indirectly support violence through uneven gender relations is presented as out-moded, dangerous and at odds with contemporary ideologies of marriage as a union between equals.

Antonio García argues that while the "revolution" for women has been about conquering public and social spaces for men it has to be a question of looking inside.<sup>360</sup> Through the spectator's privileged insights into Antonio's emotions *Te doy* is quite explicit in its thesis that the causes of domestic violence are to be found within each individual aggressor. Indeed, Antonio's story suggests that the kind of "causes" of domestic violence often cited by sociological surveys, external factors such as alcohol or drug abuse, social class, media images, unemployment, educational

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<sup>359</sup> Alvesson and Due Billing (2002: 78).

<sup>360</sup> Ferrary (2002) [accessed 23.5.07].

background or the machismo manifest in society and socialisation in Spain, are better understood as triggers.<sup>361</sup> These external factors are more easily quantifiable excuses that mask the far more difficult to measure emotional insecurities that are often not recognised, in part because they do not sit easily with conventional assumptions that masculinity is antonymous to emotion (usually associated with femininity).<sup>362</sup> In Antonio's case the emotion shown to be driving his violent behaviour towards Pilar is fear; fear that he is not good enough for her, that what he provides for her is only average, and that she will leave him if she finds someone better.

He starts to externalise his fears and insecurities when questioned by his therapist and by writing in the red pages of a colour-coded notebook, an object within the film's mise-en-scène that becomes symbolic of hope that Antonio can change and the excess emotions finds so hard to communicate to his wife. However, when Pilar, in an attempt to reach out to and help Antonio, confronts him by reading out his words and giving voice to his feelings he refuses to recognise them. He prefers to keep them repressed, and hurls the notebook and Pilar's hopes into the river before walking away. *Te doy* posits that the right and brave thing to do would be for Antonio to confront these fears and change. Valeria Saccone points out that in the light of the changing gender landscapes it is important to construct positive messages about this transformation: "Hasta ahora el discurso ha sido negativo: con la igualdad el hombre pierde privilegios. Por ello hay que empezar a subrayar lo que se puede ganar: la igualdad nos ayudaría a recuperar nuestro mundo afectivo y emocional, que se ha perdido con el patriarcado".<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> The "causas" listed here are taken from CIS (2004c) [accessed 7.1.09].

<sup>362</sup> See Fischer (2000: ix-x).

<sup>363</sup> Saccone (no date) [accessed 17.12.07].

Moreover, the actions and dialogue of the film's other male characters almost exclusively function to develop his character and these issues further by serving as points of comparison both for Antonio as diegetic spectator and for the extra-diegetic spectators. The personal details that Antonio divulges during his one-to-one meetings with the therapist, and his attempts to act upon what he has learnt, imply that there is hope that he will change. At the same time the justificatory attitudes displayed by several of the other men who attend the group present them as hopeless cases. Antonio recognises in them what he does not want to become, as he tells Pilar: "No quiero llegar a los sesenta y verme como los tipos esos de la terapia, jodidos y amargados y amargando la vida de sus familias". This is an admission that raises both Pilar and the extra-diegetic spectator's expectations that through this process of recognition of and work on his behaviour and emotions Antonio will be able to change. The absence of older males in the film points to a generation of men without tangible models, struggling to come to terms with changing gender dynamics.<sup>364</sup> The discourse of hegemonic patriarchal authority reproduced in the attitudes of some members of this younger generation as a pretext for violence is presented as incongruous to a democratic ideal of society/family; an ultimately surmountable hinderance that must be overcome.

Consistent with the sociological and pedagogical edge to Bollaín's cinema, the therapy sessions take place within a clearly institutional, classroom-like setting, while the therapist's demeanour and approach is that of teacher and facilitator. Proof of rare but potential success in the figure of the reformed abuser Julián (Francesc Garrido) helps *Te doy* to present the argument that domestic violence is not an incurable condition or inevitable facet of society. Rather, the film infers, it is a question of self-

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<sup>364</sup> See Valiente (1997: 240).

awareness that can be overcome through (re)education and a desire to learn that needs to be facilitated by the State.

Although John remains largely underdeveloped as a character he nevertheless functions as a useful ‘other’ figure through which an alternative model of (liberal) masculinity associated with Northern Europe is represented in *Te doy*. In one scene Pilar qualifies Rosa’s description of John as “un escocés maravilloso” by explaining that he sets the breakfast table, clears up, does the shopping, makes dinner and washes up.<sup>365</sup> This provokes one of her work colleagues Raquel (Chus Gutiérrez) to muse that he must be some kind of “extraterrestre”, while another, Carmen (Elena Irureta) asks where she can find a man like that. Rosa and Carmen’s remarks stress the desirability of such a man, while Raquel’s use of term “extraterrestre” emphasises John’s otherness. It also implies that this behaviour is alien to the average Spanish male, who is commonly known to undertake a meagre amount of housework compared with his female counterpart.<sup>366</sup> Similarly in the sequences where he appears together with Juan he converses, jokes or plays with his nephew, in stark contrast to Antonio’s exchanges with his son in which he interrogates, terrifies or bribes him. The (good, close) quality of the positive relationship between John and Juan is cemented in the spectator’s mind through the final image of uncle and nephew together. Scenes of Antonio’s emotional-blackmail-motivated suicide attempt and the subsequent sequence in the hospital are followed by an utopian image of domestic peace and harmony back at Ana’s flat.

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<sup>365</sup> This is arguably an autobiographical touch to the film as Bollaín is married to Paul Laverty, a Scot and regular scriptwriter for Ken Loach. There is also a degree of irony in choosing to make John Scottish, due to Scotland’s reputation for having a very high level of domestic violence, a Rab C. Nesbitt-esque stereotype that both research and *Te doy* discredits, see Ross (2008) [accessed 10.1.09].

<sup>366</sup> The “Familia: Diferencias en el uso del tiempo” statistics collected by the Instituto de la Mujer show that while women devoted an average of 7 hours 58 minutes to work in the home in 1993 and 7 hours 22 minutes in 2001, men by comparison only dedicated 2 hours 30 minutes in 1993 and 3 hours 10 minutes in 2001. See IM: Estadísticas (2001) [accessed 17.11.08].



Through Pilar's eyes we see John and Juan lying side by side in bed fast asleep, the open book by John's hand indicating he lulled his nephew to sleep by reading to him, unlike the earlier sequence in the car when Antonio had awoken Juan with his shouting [Stills 13 and 14]. Although both sequences are set late at night the darkness that envelops the characters during the incident by the side of the road is, like Antonio's escalating ferocity, oppressive and threatening. By contrast, the darkness in the later scene is softened and made comforting by the gentle, warm glow cast on slumbering figures. Neither the spectator, nor Pilar, are left in any doubt as to which man represents the more desirable husband, father figure or role model for Juan.

John's willing participation in the unpaid daily work of reproduction is perceived as unusual because it would traditionally be coded as feminine. Yet his explicit physical appearance (tall, well built, dark) and more implicit heterosexuality, work as strong signifiers of a familiar, culturally accepted image of masculinity in Spain. John seems to represent an ideal of masculinity that spectators may identify with the discourses of the sensitive, domesticated 'new man'.<sup>367</sup> He is the epitome of The New Man who "has to be gentle but not weak, malleable but not limp, masterful but not macho", who has to cook and has to clean!<sup>368</sup> It is a term that some second-wave feminists have used to express their goals and optimistic social scientific studies have adopted in their analyses.<sup>369</sup> However, looking to Anthony McMahan it could be argued that the mass media has been the 'new man's' "real home", from where it has flowed over into everyday speech.<sup>370</sup> However the period around the turn of this century saw a shift away from the 'new man' and towards the 'new lad' in the UK, a

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<sup>367</sup> See McMahan (1999: 92-149).

<sup>368</sup> Dennis (1993: 68).

<sup>369</sup> See Abbott (Ed.) (1987).

<sup>370</sup> McMahan (1999: 101).

figure that arguably finds its Spanish equivalent *par excellence* in the neo-machista title character of the *Torrente* trilogy (Santiago Segura, 1998, 2001, 2005). These are films that look back on Spain's sexy (and sexist) comedies of the 1960s and 70s, of which the spectator may be reminded when watching the scene where the therapist makes two of the group role play as husband and wife. They are told to act out a scenario, which is later repeated several times by Pilar and Antonio, of a husband returning home to his wife after work. Here the men are being encouraged to confront their own behaviour and their need to change. However, the laughter of the group at the stereotypical *machismo* reproduced in the role play is represented as their means of difusing their discomfort and avoiding serious engagement with the purpose of the exercise. This brand of humour, that has a long cultural history in Spain, and elsewhere, draws on the acceptance of the gender inequalities ingrained in everyday practices and interpersonal relationships within the family home. It elicits laughter from the audience while seeking to make them critical of these inequalities typical of patriarchal societies, that the film explicitly represents as tragic rather than comical.

John as a New Man represents a fantasy solution: a man who is so secure with(in) himself that he can wear a skirt, do the dishes and look after children but still be unmistakably masculine. By locating even just the possibility of reimagining manhood in a foreign character seems to imply the great distance the average Spanish male still has to go, but by presenting John's behaviour as desirable, frames this change in positive terms. By contrast the inability to (re)imagine a more flexible model of masculinity, implied by Antonio's resistance to and ultimate failure to change, is presented as detrimental not just to Pilar but also to his own happiness. This is stressed by the film's unhappy ending for Antonio, who is left impotent and

alone as Pilar, with the help of female solidarity in the form of her friends Rosa and Lola, walks away from him, their home and their marriage.

The meticulous development of Antonio's character helps to stress the complexities of domestic violence, shifts in the cultural construction of masculine identities and men's roles within their families at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The discourses of crisis so often surrounding questions of masculinity have come to create a climate of panic that eclipses constructive discussion about what it means to be a man at the turn of the twenty-first century. As a cultural text *Te doy* is not an indicator of changes that are taking place in men's familial roles and relationships, but rather a representation of why this change should come about, how it might happen and the kind of impact it might have on masculine identities. The extreme authoritarian patriarch promoted under Franco bears little resemblance to the model of the more caring family man demanded by both The Neoconservative Family and The Postmodern Family. Although we may gain a degree of sympathy for Antonio, the development of the narrative and Tosar's performance ensures that we stop short of empathising with him. Antonio's form of masculinity that depends on this old-fashioned notion of the authoritarian patriarch who is at liberty to use violence to impose his will is assiduously represented not only as selfish and but also unequivocally antithetical to the stability and protection The Neoconservative Family is supposed to give. At the same time, blame for family breakdown is clearly apportioned to men who cling to this intractable form of masculinity, and not to the increased mobility of women. This matter is explored in the next section through a discussion of the representation of private and public space in *Te doy*.

### 3.4 (Em)powering Women: Work, Art and Female Mobility

The gendered division of labour within The Family has traditionally bound women to their roles as mothers and housewives and to the private space of home, while fathers and husbands as material providers have been associated with the public world of work. In Spain's Catholic influenced cultural imaginary the perfect woman was an *ángel del hogar* located in and identified with the home, or as the saying goes, "la mujer en el hogar, su limpieza, su cocina y su labrar".<sup>371</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, the domestic sphere has been one of the only spaces where, traditionally, women have been able to exercise a degree of autonomy and power, yet, as Nancy Duncan points out, it has also been a space conventionally "subject to the patriarchal authority of the husband and father".<sup>372</sup> In Francoist Spain both of these experiences of home were actively promoted through, amongst other factors, social policy and the work of the Sección Femenina. Despite shifts in attitudes recorded in post-1975 opinion polls, the legacy of this period is echoed in the continued unequal division of household chores and low female employment figures in comparison with other Western European countries.<sup>373</sup> In *Te doy* the spectator deduces that during ten years of marriage Pilar has been contained within the home performing the traditional feminine role of stay-at-home mother and wife, but the job she starts while staying with her sister takes her out into the public sphere. Paying particular attention to the film's treatment of the issue of women's entrance into the labour market, the representation of private and public spaces and Pilar's movements between the two, this section considers how the film frames ongoing debates surrounding changing gendered power dynamics within The Neoconservative Family.

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<sup>371</sup> See Refranero castellano [accessed 1.4.08].

<sup>372</sup> Duncan (1996: 131).

<sup>373</sup> See Valiente (2005b: 191-193) and Brooksbank Jones (1997: 92-94).

As touched upon in the previous chapter it has, understandably, become increasingly problematic to associate women exclusively with the unpaid reproductive labour of the domestic sphere, which has traditionally included giving birth, cleaning the home, and caring for family. The repetitive nature of this work has been deemed, by those who have extolled patriarchal constructions of femininity, to be appropriate for women, whose physiques and assumed docility made this kind of labour their “natural” destiny.<sup>374</sup> This is particularly relevant in Spain where women continue to live with the legacy of a hegemonic model of womanhood that was informed by such thinking. Consequently, the struggle to ensure that women gain access to, command equality and respect in public and social spaces such as the education system and the workplace, has been one of the defining features of the women’s movement in Spain.<sup>375</sup> The prior analysis of María’s experience of exploitation in the job market in *Solas* established that this emphasis on women leaving home and triumphing in the workplace has sometimes tended to over-simplify or homogenise the female subject. However, for Pilar, a white, middle-class housewife who is the embodiment of this homogenised subject, employment outside the home is presented as a crucial means of building up her self-esteem and accessing a supportive environment where she is able to form affirmative rather than detrimental relationships amongst a community of women. This in turn gives her the emotional strength, and helps foster the critical skills she needs, to help her (re)view her own situation.

The nature of Pilar’s work not only enables her, physically and symbolically, to access the public sphere but also that of high art, traditionally almost exclusively the reserve of men as patrons, creators, and spectators where, to borrow from Laura

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<sup>374</sup> See Marchand and Sisson Runyan (2000: 16).

<sup>375</sup> Brooksbank Jones (1997: 57-70 and 73-84).

Mulvey, women as passive objectified other only existed as a source of active male visual pleasure.<sup>376</sup> It is only in these terms that Antonio seems capable of understanding Pilar's new job. After his visit to the museum to spy on her what concerns him is how attractive she looked (to the men in the audience) and how she was "a la vista de todos". However, Pilar herself, through her voluntary intellectual engagement with paintings by the Old Masters, is presented as entering their world and making it her own. The parallels between her story and the artists' subject matter and the paintings themselves position and (re)imagine Pilar (woman) as an active subject rather than as a passive object.

First in Toledo Cathedral she encounters Velázquez's "Cardenal de Borja", Estévez's "El Cardenal Borbón" and Titian's "Paulo III" figurative representations of absolute male power and the corresponding image of female suffering and submission in Luis Morales's "La dolorosa" that have literally been consigned to the museum. A series of static shot reverse shots clearly identifies Pilar from the beginning of the narrative with this model of womanhood. By contrast the mixture of sumptuous sweeping pans and inquisitive close-ups of El Greco's "El entierro del Conde de Orgaz" filtered through Pilar's optical and emotional point-of-view signals a moment of revelation for the character as she discovers the imaginative space of art from which she draws pleasure and to which she can escape. While, as González del Pozo suggests, Pilar's explanation of the stories told by Titian's "Danae recibiendo la lluvia de oro" and Rubens's "Orfeo y Eurídice", function "para guiar al espectador por el mapa de sus sentimientos".<sup>377</sup> The bronze prison tower where Danae's father locked her up poignantly having its modern day equivalent in the brick apartment block of

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<sup>376</sup> Mulvey (1993: 113-122).

<sup>377</sup> González del Pozo (2008) [accessed 10.10.08].

Pilar's marital home, while the varying treatment the painting has received over the years from its different owners tells the (hi)story of women, who have endured under oppressive patriarchal systems.<sup>378</sup>

The role of family breadwinner to which men were traditionally brought up to aspire has helped to perpetuate men's economic ascendancy and power over women that has been inscribed into the public (masculine) and private (feminine) divide. As Amy Hequembourg has pointed out, feminist analyses of *The Family* have been important in addressing "the insidious ways that power works to enhance patriarchy in and through family relationships".<sup>379</sup> Meanwhile, Victor Seidler has noted that patriarchal values have also long marked out fathering as "a position rather than a relationship", placing men "at the boundaries of family life, as figures of authority".<sup>380</sup> Antonio is repeatedly presented in these terms, entering and exiting the family home, framed by doorways. Even in sequences where the *mise-en-scène* works to make him physically look 'at home', for example when he sits in an armchair relaxing with a beer as Pilar tells him about the training course she wants to do in order to be qualified to give guided tours in the museum, his words and facial expressions signal that emotionally he remains on the boundaries. Pilar's introverted body language and stilted speech when broaching the subject evoke a nervous child asking a parent for their consent, revealing a distressingly uneven power dynamic between husband and wife. Pilar's performance of subordination reaffirms his authority yet is clearly at odds with the previous scene, cut short by Antonio's entrance, in which she had captivated Juan with her eloquent retelling of Orpheus and Eurydice's story. Having

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<sup>378</sup> Pilar "Algunos de estos dueños quisieron a Dánae así, como Júpiter, bien cerquita. Pero hubo otros que hicieron como su padre, encerrarla bajo llave para que nadie la viera. Hubo un rey que incluso pensó en quemar el cuadro, pero mira, no lo consiguió, y aquí está, a la vista de todos..."

<sup>379</sup> Hequembourg (2007: 67).

<sup>380</sup> Seidler (2003: 212).

shared Pilar's growing excitement, the spectator is likely to be frustrated by Antonio's uninterested reaction, all the more so as it becomes evident that Antonio is only able to relate to Pilar in terms of his restrictive understanding of her roles as his wife and the mother of his child, not as a person in her own right with constantly developing hopes and desires.

Antonio's initial indifference to Pilar's job turns into resentment of her physical and intellectual mobility outside the home, and then into consuming violent jealousy as he comes to see it as a threat to their marriage and his position within The Neoconservative Family. Antonio equates his wife's presence in the public sphere not only with her visibility but also with what he supposes to be her availability to other men, becoming increasingly obsessed that she will meet someone else and leave him. We may discern in this attitude a contemporary echo of Spain's long-established 'good' and 'bad' women, virgin and whore duality.<sup>381</sup> This is a dichotomy implicitly informed by the assumption that:

If the woman goes outside the house she becomes more dangerously feminine rather than masculine. A woman's interest in, let alone active role, in the outside calls into question her virtue. The woman on the outside is implicitly sexually mobile. Her sexuality is no longer controlled by the house.<sup>382</sup>

However, in-line with the discourses of popular feminism and reinforced through the words of his therapist (the professional, competent, calm voice of reason) *Te doy* is clear in representing Antonio's difficulty in accepting Pilar's transformation as an irrational fear stemming from his own insecurities. Luce Irigaray's work on the

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<sup>381</sup> Discussing how Catholicism continues to shape women's and men's relationships to their bodies, sexual orientation and emotional lives, Seidler dates this tendency in Spain back to the defence of the purity of the Catholic State during the Reconquest and under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition (2006: 40-41).

<sup>382</sup> Wigley (1992: 335).



commodification of women provides a useful starting point from which to analyse the film's representation of his attempts to (re)possess her:

He buys her a house, even shuts her up in it [...] He contains or envelops her with walls while enveloping himself and his things with her flesh. The nature of these envelopes is not the same: on one hand, invisibly alive, but with barely perceivable limits: on the other, visibly limiting or sheltering, but at the risk of being prison-like or murderous if the threshold is not left open.<sup>383</sup>

Located between the public and the private, thresholds, in the form of doors and windows, are spaces of encounter, exchange, transition and conflict. Castilian idioms like “de puertas adentro” and “de puertas afuera” reinforce the notion that doors, depending on whether they are open or closed, can be metaphors for containment, protection or freedom.

Where the old-fashioned husband in *Solas* uses his sense of smell to monitor his wife's movements, Antonio updates this scenario for the twenty-first century by buying Pilar a mobile telephone, intended as a means of technologically extending the home and his influence over her. He also attempts to restrict Pilar's movements through emotional blackmail, repeatedly trying to make her feel guilty about not being at home, and so “through creating the illusion of omnipotence his own feelings of inadequacy and helplessness are temporarily alleviated”.<sup>384</sup> However, he soon (re)turns to the constant threat of violence in an attempt to contain her through her ever-intensifying fear. Driven by his anger [fear] this mounting tension culminates in Antonio's final attack, triggered when Pilar decides to go to a job interview in Madrid, which is presented as action that irrevocably crosses physical and psychological thresholds. First he blocks Pilar's way out of the flat, imprisoning her

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<sup>383</sup> Irigaray (1993: 11).

<sup>384</sup> Motz (2008: 277).

and provoking fear of his violent or potentially murderous intent. Antonio then strips her naked and forces her out onto the balcony. This act of thrusting Pilar's body, that most intimate of all private spaces, into public view, is tantamount to rape, which Dominic Richard and David Thomas have described as representing "the ultimate violation of the private sphere by the public".<sup>385</sup> Pulling her back inside, he holds her against the glass doors to the balcony by her neck, at which she wets herself in fear. This involuntary loss of control of her bladder constitutes a powerful image of using physical and psychological violence to take away Pilar's agency. When Antonio releases Pilar telling her to go wash herself she crumples to the floor, hugging herself as her face becomes contorted by the sobs that course through her body. This moment constitutes another example of the melodramatic eloquence of mute physical gestures and inarticulate cries to express the excess emotions that words cannot [Still 15]. The attack may not result in any visible scars but powerful visual, psychological and emotional memories of it haunt both Pilar and the spectator.

Antonio's recourse to violence in an attempt to (re)possess Pilar evokes the Spanish saying, "mujer honrada, pierna quebrada y en casa", quite literally acted out in Buñuel's 1970 adaptation of Benito Pérez Galdós's novel *Tristana*.<sup>386</sup> Violence has traditionally been rationalised in Spain as a justifiable means to contain woman, perceived in term of preserving not just her own honour but also that of The Traditional Family and its patriarch in particular.<sup>387</sup> (Re)viewing this argument through the lens of post-Franco democratic ideals *Te doy* presents Antonio's behaviour as an irrational and unacceptable reaction that contravenes Article 15 of the

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<sup>385</sup> Richard and Thomas (2002: 68).

<sup>386</sup> Although the novel was set in Madrid, Buñuel interestingly set his adaptation in Toledo, similarly making use of its historical and religious weight.

<sup>387</sup> See Haimovich (1990: 81-104) and Valiente (2005a: 101-124).

Constitution: “Todos tienen derecho a la vida y a la integridad física y moral, sin que, en ningún caso, puedan ser sometidos a tortura ni a penas o tratos inhumanos o degradantes”.<sup>388</sup>

Having just witnessed this horrific attack the spectator is relieved when the image of Pilar crumpled and sobbing on the floor cuts to an image of a police officer. However, the open-plan office where Pilar is expected to recount the events, the fact that she has to speak to a male officer, the impersonal form-filling process he follows, the narrow questions set down and the stream of confusing police jargon are all presented as inappropriate and unhelpful. This is epitomised when Pilar describes Antonio’s psychological abuse, which has finally crossed an emotional threshold within her and shattered her hopes, with the only words she can find “Lo ha roto todo”. The officer’s response, “¿Ha roto efectos personales suyos?”, is a well-meaning but also excruciatingly inappropriate misinterpretation in the light of what we have seen Pilar suffer. Informing the spectator and directly criticising the State, this sequence stresses how, even when women are brave enough to report domestic violence, the authorities in Spain are ill-equipped to deal with it in a constructive and supportive manner. Pilar’s understandable decision to leave, rather than stay and make the *denuncia*, raises an important question. If, in 2003 alone, 50,090 women reported incidences of domestic violence to the police, how many cases went unreported because the system failed them?<sup>389</sup> Again *Te doy* presents us with a story that humanises statistics, helping us to understand why even in such desperate circumstances wives often decide not to press charges, “fearing the alien world of courts, police stations and publicity, even more than the familiar, private violence of

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<sup>388</sup> *Constitución Española* (1978), Artículo 15.

<sup>389</sup> IM: Estadísticas (2007) [accessed 11.7.08]. This figure only includes those reports in which the abuse was deemed to constitute a *delito* (crime) or *falta* (misdemeanour) by the police.

the home”.<sup>390</sup> The State’s system of law and order may be designed to protect individual citizens, however the shortfalls in the handling of incidences of domestic violence is represented here as potentially putting them in greater danger. Ultimately the fault is presented as lying not only with Antonio but also with society and its institutions, which must change.

The final sequences of *Te doy* could be read as a powerful statement about the future, or lack thereof, of the patriarchal system and of the authoritarian patriarch who uses violence to keep women ‘in their place’. With physical and emotional support by her female friends, who literally ensure that the threshold remains open for her, Pilar leaves Antonio. Initially, rather than follow Pilar the camera stays with Antonio, who remains inside gazing out, thereby subverting the traditional woman at the window motif. Most often associated with the Hollywood “woman’s pictures” of the 1940s this is a motif that, as Mary Ann Doane argues, has constituted a powerful visual articulation of the social and symbolic restrictive positioning of women within the “feminine” spaces of family and home.<sup>391</sup> From Antonio’s point-of-view we then see Pilar striding away from the prison-like marital home and into the public sphere. He may be looking down on her but in reclaiming her agency she has stripped him of his power over her and this elevated position merely serves to stress his self-inflicted emotional isolation. By contrast Pilar is celebrated as a quiet figure of strength and resilience as she relies on an alternative family of women to turn her back on the dangerous inequalities of The Traditional Family. The camera pans up, coming to rest on the hills that surround Toledo, as though implying new horizons for Pilar and a

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<sup>390</sup> Duncan (1996: 133).

<sup>391</sup> Doane (1987: 288).

lonely, unknown future for men like Antonio trapped in personal emotional prisons of their own making by their inability to overcome their crises and change.

The private space of the family home carries with it connotations of emotional warmth and physical safety. Marianna Torgovnick has observed, “home is the utopian ideal. Home is what we have to believe is safe, where we have to carry on as though it will be safe”.<sup>392</sup> Conversely, as *Familia, Solas* and *Te doy* explore and as Laura Goldsack has pointed out “to be private can signify deprivation as well as advantage. For women in the home, privacy can mean confinement, captivity and isolation. In such circumstances the home is less of a castle, and more of a cage”,<sup>393</sup> or, as the first part of the film’s tagline states, “donde dice hogar se lee infierno”. The patriarchal social system that has perpetuated men’s power and economic control over women and has often kept them, in the ideal if not in practice, within the domestic sphere is gradually being eroded in Spain. This is a change in which, amongst other factors, education, the implementation of equal opportunities policies and the growing number of women in paid employment have all played a part. However, the representation of private and public space in *Te doy* and the way in which it relates to gender conventions and hierarchies within The Neoconservative Family, suggest that in many cases inequalities that foster violence still persist.

### 3.5 Conclusion

At the turn of the twenty-first century husbands and wives are having to learn to find a balance between new and old family roles, responsibilities and power dynamics. *Te doy mis ojos* goes some way to recognising that in this context both

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<sup>392</sup> Torgovnick (1992: 145).

<sup>393</sup> Goldsack (1999: 121).

women and men are often charting unknown territory. As in *Familia*, photographs here are used as a means to stress the discrepancies between The Traditional Family ideal presented in public and the unjust and violent inequalities that this can mask. Similarly, the allusions to Pilar and Ana's mother's story discredit the restorative nostalgia of conservative discourses and representations that look back to the 'golden age' of The Family and Marriage (under Franco), when everything was supposedly simple, harmonious and morally sound.

Like *Solas*, *Te doy* presents the dissolution of patriarchal family structures not as the lamentable breakdown of The Traditional Family, but as a necessary change to an ideology that continues to help perpetuate male privilege and justify the violent subjugation of women. Domestic violence is represented in *Te doy* as a symptom of a male abuser's frustration with change, but also as symptomatic of the patriarchal legacy woven into the fabric of The Neoconservative Family and other social structures and institutions. Moreover, this violence is represented not, as it so often is in public discourses, as a problem for women (read women's problem), but as an issue that must be addressed collectively by women, men, families, the State and society as a whole. By taking care to include and dramatise different aspects of the debate Bollaín and Luna seem to be searching for critical engagement and an ongoing dialogue, both amongst the film's characters and its spectators.

Although critical of The Neoconservative Family *Te doy* does (re)produce positive representations of heterosexual relationships and familial models of cohabitation and marriage. However, they are (re)imagined through Ana and John's less conventional relationship and wedding where marriage is presented as what Giddens has described as "a signifier of commitment, rather than a determinant of

it”.<sup>394</sup> The film’s affective mode of address that strengthens the structures of alignment and allegiance established works to actively promote and naturalise less conventional families and living arrangements, on the basis that they may be better at fulfilling the caring protective role generally attributed to The Traditional Family.

In *Te doy* the horrific impact of domestic abuse is expressed with gut-wrenching eloquence, not by means of graphic representations of violence, but through mute but powerful signals of distress like the pair of slippers that are out of place on late night bus. Bollaín’s aesthetic and formal choices, particularly the decision to build the narrative around a surprisingly enchanting love story, ensure that *Te doy* goes beyond simply denouncing domestic violence or rendering it visible. The high degree of surface realism, melodramatic elements and juxtaposition of Pilar and Antonio’s relationship to those of secondary characters, work together with the film’s affective mode of address to question the status quo, call for greater self and social awareness and suggest possible solutions. In this way domestic violence is (re)presented as a pressing issue that must be dealt with at both a personal and a public level. It is this urgent call for self and social awareness that gives *Te doy* its didactic edge, an aspect that has also found expression in the subsequent widespread use of the film as a starting point for discussions about domestic violence and gender inequalities in Spain in both national and international teaching environments.<sup>395</sup>

Several scholars have adopted Bollaín as a “feminist” or “women’s filmmaker”.<sup>396</sup> Yet this is a label that Bollaín herself has repeatedly and vehemently

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<sup>394</sup> Giddens (1992: 192).

<sup>395</sup> For example, *Te doy* has been screened as part of events organised to discuss domestic violence arranged by organisations such as the European Parliament and the Council of Europe. It has also inspired teaching material aimed at both formal and informal educational environments, see Estudio Poliedro (2007) [accessed 7.1.09] and EduAlter (no date2) [accessed 7.1.09].

<sup>396</sup> See Camí-Vela (2000) and (2001: 41-52), Cruz (2005) and Martín Márquez (2002).

rejected.<sup>397</sup> In part this may be an attempt to distance herself from a popular (negative) perception of feminists in Spain. Yet to some degree it could also be said to align her with a brand of feminism that exists in Spain concerned with recognising women as full citizens which, at least in part, seems to be the product of a society obsessed with democracy and equal opportunities. Despite Bollaín's resistance to defining her approach or gaze as either specifically feminine or her stance as feminist *Te doy* is, nevertheless, clearly indebted to the feminist politicisation of the personal. Moreover, it does fit several of the general criteria associated with women's cinema in that it was made by a woman, is concerned with women and could be said to address women.<sup>398</sup> However, it is significant that the film could equally be described as being concerned with men and masculinity, and can be read as making a concerted effort to address men. Consequently, it seems reductive to claim *Te doy*'s broadly liberal gender politics and push towards equality for feminism or feminist filmmaking. Indeed, on the basis of Bollaín's attention to men and women and the universalist mode of address she tends to employ in her work it may be more useful to consider her instead as part of a growing group of gender conscious filmmakers.

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<sup>397</sup> See Bollaín's acerbic short article "Cine con tetas" (1998).

<sup>398</sup> These characteristics of women's cinema are taken from Butler (2002: 1).



## CHAPTER FOUR

### QUEERING THE MAINSTREAM: FAMILIES OF CHOICE, PARENTHOOD AND CHILDREN IN MIGUEL ALBALADEJO'S *CACHORRO* (2004)

“Te quiero mucho, igual que los otros niños a sus padres”

Bernardo: *Cachorro*

#### 4.1 Introduction

*Cachorro* tells the story of Pedro (José Luis García Pérez), who agrees to look after his hippie sister Violeta's (Elvira Lindo) nine year old son Bernardo (David Castillo) while she goes on a two-week holiday to India with her new boyfriend. An uninhibited, promiscuous homosexual with few responsibilities apart from his job as a dentist Pedro moderates his behaviour for the days Bernardo is with him. While Violeta is away Bernardo's estranged grandmother Doña Teresa (Empar Ferrer), the mother of his father, who died of a drug overdose for which she blames her daughter-in-law, appears at Pedro's flat hoping to spend some time with her grandson. But Bernardo does not want to see her because of her embittered attitude towards his mother. A series of melodramatic twists in the plot ensue. First Violeta is imprisoned in India for drug smuggling then Doña Teresa, assuming that she can provide a more suitable home environment for her grandson, seizes the chance to get back into Bernardo's life. Initially she threatens legal proceedings based on photographic proof of Pedro's active sex life, but Bernardo wants to stay with his uncle and Pedro is willing to do everything he can to ensure this happens. However, using Pedro's medical records as leverage (he is HIV-positive), Doña Teresa eventually blackmails him into accepting a compromise: she will pay for Bernardo to go to a secular,

bilingual boarding school near Valencia where she lives and allow him to visit his uncle if he gets good grades. Pedro feels that he has no alternative but to agree and it is only with the last melodramatic twist of Doña Teresa's death some years later that Pedro and Bernardo, now a teenager, are reunited.

Judged to be suffering from a mental disease and deviant to the point of criminality by the Franco regime, homosexuals came to be protected by Spanish law with the coming of democracy and the impact of international gay rights movements.<sup>399</sup> This is not to say that members of gay communities do not still suffer discrimination and abuse, but by 2004 national opinion polls did indicate a relatively high acceptance of homosexuality.<sup>400</sup> By the time *Cachorro* was released, GLBT pressure groups were campaigning for a modification of Spain's Civil Code to legalise gay marriage and ensure equal adoption rights for non-heterosexual couples. This move towards the legal recognition of non-heterosexual commitment and kinship networks was particularly significant because, as Nicola Evans notes, "the equation 'straight is to gay as family is to non-family' has long served as a means by which gays and lesbians are rendered less than human".<sup>401</sup> While some, including the ruling PP, opposed this development on the basis that it would damage The Traditional Family;<sup>402</sup> others hailed the proposed changes as a means of strengthening family and as a potential human rights milestone for Spain. Within GLBT communities themselves there were mixed opinions on the matter. These ranged from those resistant to the normalisation and institutionalisation, embodied by Marriage and The

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<sup>399</sup> See Bergmann and Smith (1995: 10). Homosexual acts were not decriminalised in Spain until December 1978, while the *Ley de peligrosidad social* passed in 1970 had raised the maximum penalty for a single "offence" to three years in prison.

<sup>400</sup> See CIS (2004d) [accessed 7.1.09].

<sup>401</sup> Evans (2002: 274).

<sup>402</sup> For example the conservative FEF claimed that the proposed reform of the Civil Code would contravene Article 39 of the Spanish constitution "que establece la obligación de los poderes públicos de velar por el bien de la familia" (FEF, 2004b) [accessed 8.5.06].

Traditional Family, to those more concerned that everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation, should enjoy the same conjugal rights and benefits. This chapter argues that *Cachorro*'s underlying themes, an exploration of what makes a (good) parent, what children need, and how the meaning of family is being transformed, foreshadow aspects of what would become a major political debate following the change in government in March 2004 shortly after the film's release in February of the same year.

It is important to note that the use of the term 'queer' and 'queering' in relation to the representation of families in Albaladejo's *Cachorro* is to employ a concept that has been imported into Spain. According to Armand de Fluvià the gay movement in Spain is largely without traditions or history, he explains that neither he nor his fellow post-Franco activists were aware of any tradition of homosexual politics or culture in Spain and so they "either had to do without it or import it from abroad".<sup>403</sup> Already complex where it originated in the UK and US, in the shadow of AIDS and as a reaction to more moderate 'gay politics', 'queer' takes on another level of complexity when imported, untranslated, to Spain. In this chapter 'queer' is understood in a number of different and yet contiguous ways. Firstly, underpinning all of the following analysis is the notion that 'queer', as it has been reappropriated and redefined, "allows us to examine both straight and non-straight sexualities, in order to deconstruct the ways and means that patriarchal hegemony constructs and maintains the idea that only one sexuality (married-straight-white-man-on-top-of-woman-sex-for-procreation-only) is normal and desirable".<sup>404</sup> Secondly, 'queer' is used in place of

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<sup>403</sup> Mira (2000: 241), quoting Armand de Fluvià, who was a leading gay activist during the 1970s and founded El Casal Lambda, an NGO that provided a space for homosexuals to meet and seek advice, in 1976. See El Casal Lambda [accessed 7.1.09].

<sup>404</sup> Beshoff and Griffin (2004: 5-6).

the more limited terms ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ to refer to a much broader understanding of sexual orientations and identities that resists a more prescriptive classification.

Building on this, ‘queer’ is also used to refer to what Zoë Newman describes as “an anti-assimilationist, defiant, ‘in your face,’ aggressive, unapologetic celebration of difference” that comes together around a critique of ‘the normal’ rather than an assumption of sameness.<sup>405</sup> David Córdoba observes that the adoption of queer in the Spanish context places importance on “las conexiones con las comunidades gays y lesbianas allí [en el ámbito anglosajón] donde se han desarrollado con más fuerza, por encima de las especificidades nacionales”.<sup>406</sup> Implicit in this is the location of queer in an undefined international space outside Spain that is estranged from and yet in dialogue with national culture.

The increased visibility of queer characters, concerns and viewing pleasures were trailblazed in Spain by Eloy de la Iglesia, Ventura Pons and Almodóvar.<sup>407</sup> Alfeo Álvarez suggests that the true queer turn in Spanish cinema comes in the wake of Almodóvar’s work, which broke with taboos and infused representations of homosexuality with an everyday quality. Post-Almodóvar “ya no es necesario justificar ni explicar por qué se es homosexual y qué significa [...] Ser gay es un hecho incuestionable e incontestable, un rasgo no negociable en la arquitectura del propio personaje”.<sup>408</sup> Since the mid-1990s there has been what has been identified as a “modest explosion of gay-themed films”, including what we might term the new (homo)sexy Iberian comedies like *Alegre ma non troppo* (Fernando Colomo, 1994), *Más que amor, frenesí* (Alfonso Albacete, David Menkes and Miguel Bardem, 1996),

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<sup>405</sup> Newman (2001: 132).

<sup>406</sup> Córdoba (2005: 21).

<sup>407</sup> Catalan director Pons’s first film, the documentary *Ocaña, retrat intermitent* (1978), is generally deemed as groundbreaking but is not as well-know as de la Iglesia’s or Almodóvar’s work.

<sup>408</sup> Alfeo Álvarez (2000: 143).

*Perdona bonita, pero Lucas me quería a mí* (Félix Sabroso and Dunia Ayaso, 1997) and Yolanda García Serrano and Juan Luis Iborra's *Amor de hombre* (1997).<sup>409</sup> These are films that Santiago Fouz-Hernández and Alfredo Martínez-Expósito describe as being “rather regressive in their representational politics”, due, amongst other factors, to their gay characters who are in some way “defective” and desiring rather than desirable.<sup>410</sup> Moreover, they add, the homosexual body is often associated with “body fascist” stereotypes and/or disease, while the homoerotic pleasure of audience or the characters is curtailed.<sup>411</sup> Albaladejo explains that *Cachorro* grew out of a frustration with such recent trends in gay cinema, which he criticises for its use of crude comical elements and comfortable stereotypes; “el homosexual ideal, guapo, culto sensible, romántico, o, por otra parte, el gracioso con mucha pluma, ambos tipos amigos fantásticos para las chicas”.<sup>412</sup>

In *Cachorro* Albaladejo attempts to redress the balance by presenting the spectator with, or in many cases introducing us to, a community of ‘bears’; just one of a plurality of gay sub-cultures, in this case one imported from the United States that has found its own expression and following in Spain. Bears are generally understood to be hairy, big-hearted, homosexual men of heavy build, while *cachorro* (cub) usually refers to a young, younger looking or young-at-heart bear; in the film it is an affectionate term for Bernardo who is accepted into Pedro’s bear family. This brief description, like the representation of bears in the film, does not, cannot avoid

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<sup>409</sup> Fouz-Hernández and Perriam (2000: 96).

<sup>410</sup> Fouz-Hernández and Martínez-Expósito (2007: 111-134).

<sup>411</sup> For more comprehensive studies of representations of homosexuality in Spanish cinema see Smith (1992), Llamas (1995), Fouz-Hernández and Perriam (2000), Alfeo Álvarez (2000) and Mira (2004).

<sup>412</sup> Albaladejo (2004) [accessed 5.12.07].

stereotypes.<sup>413</sup> However, what is significant is the film's implicit recognition of stereotypes by very consciously introducing another one that takes on particular resonance in the Spanish context. Making reference to the Spanish proverb "El hombre como el oso, cuanto más pel(ud)o más hermoso" Jorge Minguell stresses how the stereotypes of bears and the average Iberian male coincide.<sup>414</sup> Albaladejo notes how the typical physical appearance of bears, "medio calvos, fondoncillos y con barba, dan una imagen muy paternal", suited the film's familial focus.<sup>415</sup> This raises questions about the queering of the national male and the family man that are addressed later in this chapter.

The bright colours, smiling bearded faces and young boy of the *Cachorro* poster, together with the 'cute' title suggest that the spectator can expect an uncomplicated comedy, potentially for children.<sup>416</sup> Only a second more careful/informed look may read the Chueca metro sign as a signifier of gay culture in Madrid, appreciating the double meaning of the title, and intimate that it is likely to centre on gay characters. The location used for *Cachorro*, Chueca, the gay district in the centre of Madrid and therefore at the heart of Spain, geographically anchors the film in a real place and a national context. This local flavour is emphasised by Albaladejo's choosing real rather than invented gay nightclubs and actual members of Madrid's bear community rather than actors as extras. This decision to blend real people and places with fictional characters and situations has interesting implications in relation to

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<sup>413</sup> Most sources consulted stressed that although these may be recognised as bear characteristics there is, however, no uniform definition of a bear. See, for example, [thecompletebear.com](http://thecompletebear.com) [accessed 8.12.07] or [thecubbyhole.com](http://thecubbyhole.com) [accessed 8.12.07].

<sup>414</sup> Minguell (2005) [accessed 2.11.07].

<sup>415</sup> Abcguionistas (2004) [accessed 5.12.07].

<sup>416</sup> Preempting this expectation in prospective viewers, *Washington Post* critic Desson Thomson playfully opens his review by issuing the warning "DON'T BE FOOLED by the title: *Bear Cub* is not, repeat *not*, a children's film" (2005) [accessed 5.12.07].

questions of pleasure and consumption.<sup>417</sup> On the level of narrative Albaladejo uses a range of internationally recognizable references that explicitly or implicitly position the film within a complex transnational web of texts that range from Walt Disney's *The Jungle Book* (Wolfgang Reitherman, 1967) to *Three Men and a Baby* (Leonard Nimoy, 1987: USA). Leaning on familiar themes and storylines *Cachorro* can be seen to be located within what Daniel Chandler has referred to as a "society of texts", that once recognised afford a richer reading and viewing experience.<sup>418</sup> As is discussed throughout this chapter, allusions to or the inclusion of parts of these texts work in a number of ways including engaging the spectator, cuing certain expectations, and encouraging emotional and moral alignment with certain characters and plot outcomes.

Fouz-Hernández and Martínez-Expósito have argued that "comedies such as *Perdona bonita* are often made with the mainstream public in mind and tease gay audiences by encouraging a homoerotic gaze on the male body whilst often frustrating queer visual pleasure".<sup>419</sup> *Cachorro*, on the other hand, is obviously made with a gay public in mind and may indulge and satisfy queer pleasures not just through its sex scenes but also in the inclusion of details likely to go unnoticed by mainstream audiences but which resonate with gay audiences. For example the incorporation into the diegetic soundtrack of "Hombres" and "Me odio cuando miento", songs by electro-pop band Fangoria comprised of the musicians Nacho Canut and gay icon Alaska (Olvido Gara), who played punk lesbian Bom in Almodóvar's *Pepi, Luci, Bom*

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<sup>417</sup> An examination of posts on the "In real life..." thread on *Cachorro*'s IMDb message board, especially those by gay viewers living outside Spain, suggest how for some the film functions like an advert enticing them to Madrid with the very real possibility that if they go to the film's featured nightclub "Hot" they might be able to meet (or even hook up with) one of the extras. See IMDb Message Board: *Cachorro* [accessed 24.3.09].

<sup>418</sup> Chandler (2008: 201).

<sup>419</sup> Fouz-Hernández and Martínez-Expósito (2007: 134).

*y otras chichas del montón* (1980).<sup>420</sup> Also included are fleeting glimpses of comics created by the cult illustrator Nazario's *Anarcoma 2* (1987) and internationally renowned gay German artist Ralf König's *Super Paradise* (1999).<sup>421</sup> Robert Aldrich and Garry Wotherspoon note that "drawing humour from real-life situations, his [König's] world is one viewed from the perspective of an urban gay man" and that his work focuses "on gay life in all its sexiness, seriousness and silliness".<sup>422</sup> Although not based on any specific König work Albaladejo has indicated that he wanted *Cachorro* to tell a story about a group of gay men in a way that would pay homage to the German artist's unapologetic, forthright, ironic style.<sup>423</sup> The result of this multilayered intertextuality is a film that speaks directly to a queer audience affording them a privileged relationship to the text while remaining open and accessible to other possible audiences who are not 'in the know'.

*Cachorro* has attracted quite a variety of labels including comedy/drama (IMDb.com), drama (rottentomatoes.com), romantic comedy (mcu.es) and gay interest (tlareleasing.com), yet it is perhaps best understood as marked by all of these genre categories rather than belonging to any one of them. As is typical of the other films considered in this thesis *Cachorro* shifts constantly between comedic, melodramatic and romantic modes to tell its story. Altman has suggested that in the postmodern era intertextuality offers viewers "a new 'home' located in previous

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<sup>420</sup> See Allinson (2002: 222-236) for a study of Alaska's status as a (sub)cultural icon.

<sup>421</sup> Nazario's character "Anarcoma", a male to female transvestite detective, first appeared in the underground magazine *El vibora* (Barcelona, 1979-2005). König is author of comic book cult classics such as *Kondom des Grauens* (*The Killer Condom*, 1987), *Lysistrata* (1987) adapted by Catalan director Francesc Bellmunt in 2002 as *Lisistrata* with Maribel Verdú in the title role, *Der bewegte Mann* (*Maybe, Maybe Not*, 1987) and its sequel *Pretty Baby* (1988). The latter two were adapted as *Der bewegte Mann* (Sönke Wortmann, 1994), which was a huge box office hit in Germany attracting over six million spectators (IMDb), although König criticised it for presenting a "heterosexualised version' of gay life" (Aldrich and Wotherspoon, 2002: 234-235).

<sup>422</sup> Aldrich and Wotherspoon (2002: 235).

<sup>423</sup> See Hermoso (2004) [accessed 5.12.07].



media-viewing experiences and the comfort of recognizing generic references”.<sup>424</sup> *Cachorro* seems to be strategically positioned between the more homely mainstream, the positive images of homosexuality championed by gay and lesbian film and the more provocative stance of queer film. Albaladejo, better known for his moderately successful firmly mainstream films such as the family film *Manolito Gafotas* (1999), the romantic comedies *La primera noche de mi vida* (1998) and *El cielo abierto* (2001), and the drama *Rencor* (2002), lacks the *auteur* credentials of Almodóvar who, as Julianne Pidduck notes, “is often celebrated, particularly outside Spain, as a ‘queer’ director”.<sup>425</sup> Similarly *Cachorro*’s mainstream feel and look does set it apart from the more distinctive narrative strategies and aesthetic choices so apparent in the work of, say, Almodóvar, Derek Jarman or Todd Haynes; or the more experimental, avant-garde work of independent filmmakers like Matthias Müller, Barbara Hammer or Sadie Benning. Nevertheless *Cachorro* directly addresses a queer audience, presents sexually explicit material, seems largely unconcerned with “positive images” of its gay characters, all characteristics attributed to “queer film” by Alexander Doty.<sup>426</sup> The chapter considers how a critical discussion about family and parenthood is created through a dialogue between the kind of transgressive facets specified by Doty and *Cachorro*’s more familiar and mundane qualities. Furthermore, although *Cachorro* primarily found an audience on the international gay and lesbian film festival circuit

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<sup>424</sup> Altman (1999: 194).

<sup>425</sup> Pidduck (2003: 291).

<sup>426</sup> See Doty (1998: 148-152). Doty associates “queer film”, a complex term that in many ways wilfully resists definition, with a group of critically acclaimed films from the early 1990s including *Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingstone, 1990: USA), *Poison* (Todd Haynes, 1991: USA) and *Young Soul Rebels* (Isaac Julien, 1991: UK) the beginning of what has been called “New Queer Cinema”.

this chapter explores the notion that the film arguably raises the most incisive questions and ideas about family for a Spanish national mainstream audience.<sup>427</sup>

## 4.2 Towards The Postmodern Family

Commenting on Eloy de la Iglesia's *Los novios búlgaros* (2003), a film that also features a group of highly promiscuous homosexuals living in Chueca, Fouz-Hernández and Martínez-Expósito note that the protagonist's "loneliness becomes symptomatic of a gay culture heavily focused on hedonism but not enough meaningful relationships".<sup>428</sup> *Cachorro*, by contrast, presents the spectator with the equally promiscuous Pedro and his close community of bear friends; a "family of choice" where individuals combine erotic involvement with strong emotional and practical support of each other.<sup>429</sup> Mary Rogers has noted that "once one leaves the social space covered by the institution of heterosexuality, 'family' and 'community' commonly become coextensive. They are the people with whom we figure things out, share our news and our love, and forge our future".<sup>430</sup> This section considers how *Cachorro* (re)presents, develops and validates The Postmodern Family in the form of "families of choice" by drawing on a complex but accessible intertextual framework that appeals to the spectator's knowledge and enjoyment of familiar mainstream texts. A focus is also placed on how transgressive elements are introduced in *Cachorro* as a means of queering or destabilising familial conventions.

The first part of the film revolves around the details of daily life for Pedro and Bernardo, allowing Albaladejo to focus on imagining how such familial communities

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<sup>427</sup> See Primary Filmography for details of viewing figures, awards and festival participation.

<sup>428</sup> Fouz-Hernández and Martínez-Expósito (2007: 117).

<sup>429</sup> See Weston (1991: 103-136).

<sup>430</sup> Rogers (1998: 294).

could be, rather than trying to justify their existence/difference. As critic Sergi Sánchez has noted “lo que otros hubieran pintado con los colores de lo sórdido, aquí [en *Cachorro*] tiene los colores de lo cotidiano”.<sup>431</sup> Here it may be helpful to consider how *Cachorro* fits into and enters into dialogue with the wider landscape of popular cultural texts around the turn of the millenium, particularly the national and international television programming being consumed in Spain. Perriam notes that up until 1995 Spanish television, that most heteronormative of popular mediums, had largely eschewed positive images of homosexuals.<sup>432</sup> However, since the late nineties an increasing number of advertisements, reality TV shows like the 2004 edition of *La granja* (Antena 3) and *Operación triunfo* (TVE 1) in 2003 and popular serials like *7 vidas* (Telecinco, 1999-2006) and *Aquí no hay quien viva* (henceforth *Aquí no*) (Antena 3, 2003-2006) have presented lesbian, gay, bisexual and transexual contestants and characters in increasingly positive and nuanced ways.<sup>433</sup> This is a significant shift, especially in light of Yolanda Montero’s contention that “la televisión realiza una función socializadora fundamentalmente mediante el entretenimiento y la ficción resulta a menudo mucho más eficaz que la información a la hora de influir las opiniones y actitudes de la gente”.<sup>434</sup>

In *7 vidas* and *Aquí no*, as with *Cachorro*, it is possible to discern echoes of the formula of friends instead of family, providing a haven in a heartless world, made popular by successful American sitcoms exported to Spain such as *Friends* (NBC, 1994-2004), *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998-2004) and *Will and Grace* (NBC, 1998-

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<sup>431</sup> Sánchez (no date) [accessed 30.11.07].

<sup>432</sup> Perriam (1995: 395).

<sup>433</sup> See Benito (2004) [5.6.06].

<sup>434</sup> Montero (2006) [accessed 6.6.06].

2006).<sup>435</sup> Commenting on *7 vidas* Smith observes that it “looks forward to new structures of feeling that remain controversial”.<sup>436</sup> He also notes how in *Aquí no* “the decline of the idealized nuclear family is, however, clearly counterbalanced by the show’s transparent fondness towards its new elective groupings of friends, lovers, and children”.<sup>437</sup> While remarking on the high viewing figures attracted by the storylines involving *Aquí no*’s gay protagonist Mauri (Luis Merlo), Solís and Alonso ask the pertinent question: “¿Alguna vez imaginaste a tus padres y a tus abuelos viendo estas cosas por la tele?”<sup>438</sup> Such transformations in Spain’s cultural landscape have arguably pre-empted or at least encouraged changes in attitude and levels of acceptance amongst the general public. Applauded by GLBT groups in Spain for their role in helping to increase visibility and acceptance of diversity in relation to sexual orientation, these popular texts have largely helped to shift opinions through normalisation.<sup>439</sup> That is to say that heterosexual characters are simply replaced by homosexual characters, who proceed to play out the usual storylines about lives, loves and losses. *Cachorro* was made and released in this context but in terms of its representational strategies seems to try to steer a course between this drive towards normalisation, in an attempt to avoid alienating mainstream audiences, and a more transgressive approach.

Álvarez has identified an influential aspect of Almodóvar’s filmmaking as his use of *mise-en-scène*, through which he installs his queer characters “en un universo de estilo y confort que, partir de él, va a ser muy frecuente a la hora de codificar los

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<sup>435</sup> See Sandell (1998: 143) on the use of this formula in *Friends*.

<sup>436</sup> Smith (2006a: 47).

<sup>437</sup> Smith (2006b: 109).

<sup>438</sup> Solís and Alonso [accessed 27.11.07].

<sup>439</sup> TVblog Anonymous (2004) [accessed 6.6.06].

espacios gays en muchos de los relatos cinematográficos españoles [posteriores]”.<sup>440</sup>

In *Cachorro* the contents and decoration of Pedro’s apartment could also be read as an acknowledgement of the spending power of the so-called ‘pink pound/euro’, and a nod towards consumerism as a social leveller.<sup>441</sup> This shift can be read as more radical, but at the same time more problematic, than it may at first seem. On one hand to associate queer characters with attractive domestic spaces previously reserved for heterosexuals within the cultural imaginary implies an opening up of this bastion of straight, middle-class comfort. However, difference may also conveniently be masked by designer wallpaper, or made palatable to a wider audience by aligning queer sexual practices with attractive works of art. *Cachorro*’s opening credit sequence could be seen as a perfect illustration of this legacy of queer domestication. Filmed in broad daylight it combines a graphic bear-on-bear sex scene, mediated by a set that would not look out of place in an interior design magazine. Visually lingering medium shots, close-ups, slow pans, dissolves and shifts in focus tantalisingly capture paintings, carved furniture and other stylish domestic trappings that frame and reflect the sexual foreplay taking place, quite literally making gay sex part of the furniture. This is particularly apparent in a long shot showing one of the men performing fellatio on the other as they lie on bright crisp bed linen that covers a beautifully made wooden bed above which a striking blue and turquoise painting hangs. Hence despite being refreshingly matter-of-fact in his approach, Albaladejo’s use of the *mise-en-scène* is in danger of understating or normalising gay sex by placing it within the safe confines of an affluent and appealing domestic space that draws it back towards the mainstream. However, the explicit representation of male genitalia in the sequence, in

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<sup>440</sup> Alfeo Álvarez (2000: 143).

<sup>441</sup> For a brief discussion of the “pink pound/euro” see Baker (2002: 175-176).

the form of a fully erect penis, goes far beyond anything usually seen in mainstream films. As Albaladejo has noted, “sin esa escena, el filme hubiese parecido *La casa de la pradera* y a mí *La casa de la pradera* no me gusta”.<sup>442</sup> Nevertheless, this sequence sets up a pattern repeated throughout the film of an assimilationist thrust shot through by moments of transgression that unsettle accepted meanings and conventions.

The surprise party Pedro’s bear friends have organised for him establishes a convivial, celebratory atmosphere in which the spectator is first introduced to this family of choice. The location used for the sequence, Javi’s tiny attic flat with its sloping walls and low beams, creates a small, intimate space that fittingly requires the group to crowd together. As Javi opens the door, the sudden illumination evokes the flash of a camera as they shout “¡Sorpresa!” and Bernardo is drawn inwards into this living family snapshot with Pedro and Javi outside completing this close knit circle [Still 16]. Tightly framed head and shoulder or medium shots are used throughout the sequence to emphasise the sense of physical and emotional intimacy between the men.<sup>443</sup> We watch from Pedro’s point-of-view as Jorge (Jorge Calvo) starts by presenting Juan (Juan Manuel Lara) to Bernardo as the “la ma[triarca]” but then reverts instead to the more conventional term “el patriarca”. As Weeks has suggested, “it seems that we can only find the terms to describe our most passionate loyalties within the language of family relationships”.<sup>444</sup> Significantly in (re)presenting themselves Pedro and his bear friends innovatively use these titles associated with

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<sup>442</sup> Krauthausen (2004) [accessed 28.11.07].

<sup>443</sup> Later in the sequence a poster for John Ford’s *Two Rode Together* (1961) and a number of black and white stills from Westerns form the backdrop to the men dancing together. A reference to the cinematic genre that has afforded the greatest importance to male relationships, whether between the hero and his sidekick, fathers and sons or within the context of an all-male group. These details further stress the theme of male bonding between men who are (re)presented as overtly masculine but in an era where homoerotic subtexts would become the focus of a mainstream text just a year later in Ang Lee’s *Brokeback Mountain* (2005: Canada/USA).

<sup>444</sup> Weeks (1991: 228).

conventional forms of kinship but refer to themselves collectively as *la mafia rosa* or *la mafia osa*. The term mafia carries contrasting meanings; it can refer to a tightly knit group of trusted (male) associates who are not necessarily biologically related, but also brings with it connotations of brutal organised crime. The queer appropriation of the term plays with these possible definitions creating a familial image with a transgressive edge. At the same time the qualifying *rosa* or *osa* is a means of firmly asserting sexual orientation and preferences as a key component of how they choose to identify themselves. For Pedro the *mafia osa* performs the functions conventionally attributed to family, they are his support network, a source of encouragement, love (both sexual and nonsexual) and the people he can rely upon when things go wrong. An improvisational pastiche, the *mafia osa* in *Cachorro* could be read as just one of the many diverse permutations of The Postmodern Family that has come about through adaptation to changing needs and circumstances.

Filmmakers on both sides of the Atlantic have used the “man unexpectedly has to take care of a baby” scenario in popular movies ranging from Aguirre’s *Soltero y padre en la vida* (1972) in Spain to the US’s top grossing film of 1987 *Three Men and a Baby*, a remake of the French original *Trois hommes et un couffin* (Coline Serreau, 1985). These films exploit the comic potential of gender role reversals as the male protagonists make clumsy attempts at ‘mothering’ and their bachelor lifestyles clash with the new demands of parental responsibilities. *Cachorro*, as maintained in the previous section, follows a similar formula but exchanges the baby for a precocious nine-year-old who knows his own mind. In this respect the connections made in the film between Bernardo and the similarly strong-minded character of Mowgli in Walt Disney’s adaptation of *The Jungle Book* is particularly apt. We learn that Pedro’s dead partner Eduardo nicknamed himself Baloo and Bernardo as Mowgli in reference to

the film.<sup>445</sup> Again *Cachorro* places the familiar, in this case Disney's allegiance from the 1930s to the present day with what Griffin describes as "an image of conservative American family values – values which uphold the heterosexual patriarchal family unit in a nostalgic remembrance of some bygone era" in tension with its queer appropriation.<sup>446</sup> The story of the 'mancub' Mowgli, raised by wolves and looked after by Baloo the bear and Bagheera the panther on the way back to the 'man village', is one of cinema's alternative family narratives par excellence, which also possesses obvious 'bear' appeal. Like Mowgli, Bernardo is shown experiencing an unconventional upbringing and perhaps facing situations generally considered dangerous or unsuitable for children, and yet he is presented as having received a good education in 'the jungle' (las Alpujarras/Chueca) based on "the bare necessities" of trust, respect and love. The use of these popular formulas and texts during the first half of *Cachorro* provides a familiar means of recognising The Postmodern Family that, as the narrative develops, the spectator is encouraged to evaluate and ultimately validate.

Film critic Stephen Holden points out that were *Cachorro* an American film "you can bet it would be puritanically wringing its hands over Pedro's supposed inappropriateness as a guardian and a role model" and that "it would probably involve a fierce court battle, a death scene and a final, tearful reunion between the son and his morally chastened mother".<sup>447</sup> The introduction of the character of Doña Teresa's lawyer (Alfonso Torregrosa) does raise the expectation that it too may veer in the direction of a courtroom drama. As in the child custody dramas *Kramer vs. Kramer*

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<sup>445</sup> It is the Disney film rather than Kipling's original that is referred to in *Cachorro*.

<sup>446</sup> Griffin (2000: xii). Griffin also stresses "the importance of Disney to gay culture, and conversely the growing importance of gay culture to Disney" (2000: xv).

<sup>447</sup> Holden (2004) [accessed 28.11.07].



(Robert Benton, 1979: USA) or the more recent *I am Sam* (Jessie Nelson, 2001: USA), *Cachorro* starts by firmly establishing the strength of the bond between an adult male and the child in his care. The former escalate the question of who or what makes a suitable environment for a child to grow up in to the public sphere of law courts, only to find a personal means of overturning the official verdict. *Cachorro* may include the same melodramatic plot device of a child unwillingly separated from a father figure but it shies away from public courtrooms or any explicit engagement with the political arguments surrounding the adoption of children by non-heterosexuals. Instead the film focuses on the matter as an intensely private/personal dilemma. While this may seem disappointingly depoliticised it is possible that the film's power lies precisely in this choice to privilege the personal and the emotional rather than legal discourses as a means of evaluating the unconventional family unit that Pedro and Bernardo form.

Through its emphasis on winning and sustaining the spectators' emotional allegiance to the relationship between uncle and nephew *Cachorro* could be said to mobilise what Williams, discussing how the melodramatic mode is structured, has termed "the 'dual recognition' of how things are and how they should be".<sup>448</sup> Implicit in this strategy is the inference, also present in *Kramer vs. Kramer* and *I am Sam*, that the emotional may have something to teach legal discourses shaped to support The Traditional Family. Although used as a threat by Doña Teresa, there are no official rulings or courtroom scenes in *Cachorro*, nevertheless, the spectator is presented with a sequence in which each of the protagonists present 'evidence' in the form of the emotions conveyed in private correspondence. This epistolary sequence diverges stylistically from the rest of the film as voice-overs and direct address are used to

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<sup>448</sup> Williams (1998: 48).

make public the private contents of these letters. Yet, rather than being used as a disruptive distancing technique or as a means to reveal the artifice behind the fiction, direct address seems to be employed here to draw the spectator further in. Addressed in turn as a daughter(-in-law), a mother and a son, the spectator is positioned to recognise themselves as the immediate interlocutor. At the same time as this sequence imaginatively interpellates the spectator into this web of familial relationships, it also seems to ask us to reach the verdict that there is no single or correct answer to the question of what might be best for Bernardo. Nevertheless, the funeral and the tearful reunion between Bernardo and (a still morally unchaste) Pedro in the final sequence leave us in no doubt as to the conclusion the film ideally wants the spectator to reach. The melodramatic twist of Doña Teresa's passing not only allows for a symbolic end to the more old-fashioned ideas about family and raising children that she stood for, but also prepares the ground for hopeful new beginnings for The Postmodern Family formed by Pedro and Bernardo.

Against a setting where acceptance is a given rather than something that has to be fought for, *Cachorro* presents the variations in the patterns of domestic involvement, sexual intimacy and mutual responsibilities that this development constitutes in positive, almost utopian terms. Yet, at the same time there is a candid recognition of Weeks's argument that increasingly people "make it up as they go along, adapting traditional patterns or shaping new ones".<sup>449</sup> But rather than contributing to the discourses of crisis and breakdown surrounding The Neoconservative Family *Cachorro* works instead to stress Stacey's simple but profound conclusion: "All our families are queer; let's get used to it".<sup>450</sup> Through a

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<sup>449</sup> Weeks (2007: 171).

<sup>450</sup> Stacey (1996: 105).

combination of engagement with familiar texts and positive representation of Pedro's "family of choice", *Cachorro* positions the spectator to recognise, evaluate and welcome The Postmodern Family as a viable and desirable development. Indeed it is only (heterosexual) prejudice in the form of Doña Teresa that disrupts the family of choice formed by Bernardo, Pedro and his close friends. She is presented as experiencing what Stacey has described as "the cognitive dissonance, and even emotional threat, that much of the non-gay public experiences upon recognizing that gays can participate in family life at all".<sup>451</sup> Doña Teresa's boarding school compromise, and her belief that it represents a suitable (heterosexual) environment for Bernardo to grow up in, is responsible for physically disrupting the bond that forms between nephew and uncle. However, the emotional strength of this bond is presented as being stronger than society's prejudices.

### 4.3 Queering Parenthood

Marriage and The Family have traditionally been (re)presented as God-given moral safeguards, necessary for the regulation of procreation and irrational sexual urges. Implicitly and explicitly imagined as heterosexual institutions, sex within them has conventionally been accepted as good, safe and (re)productive. By contrast, homosexual sex, especially as it is represented in *Cachorro* as a series of encounters with strangers or casual lovers, has been culturally coded as transgressive, dangerous and destructive. This, in turn, has contributed to prejudiced assumptions that gays and lesbians are psychologically unhealthy, unstable people who are consequently incapable of forming a family and lacking in parenting skills.<sup>452</sup> This section analyses

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>452</sup> See González (2005) [accessed 13.11.07].

how, in *Cachorro*, the representation of sexual activity, in addition to being a potential source of (queer) viewing pleasure, also functions to raise fundamental questions about parenting, boundaries and familial commitments at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The privileged status afforded to heterosexuality as the culturally accepted norm has made it largely invisible, conversely, homosexuality, in its deviation from this perceived norm, renders sexuality and the sexual act itself more visible. This is further emphasised in *Cachorro* by Pedro being presented throughout the film as fitting the stereotype of a gay man with a voracious appetite for casual sexual encounters. In this way he reproduces what sociologist Christian Klesse has termed “the discursive fusion of [male] homosexuality and promiscuity” and the dominant representation of gayness as “over-determined by an assumption of excessive, contagious and promiscuous sexuality”.<sup>453</sup> This is a choice seemingly at odds with the otherwise largely positive representation of homosexuality in *Cachorro* that *Fotogramas* critic Sergi Sánchez has described as “la película gay menos acomplejada desde *La ley del deseo*”.<sup>454</sup> Yet while some, or even many spectators may find Pedro’s sex life shocking or irresponsible, the film is careful not to portray it as something shameful or overly hazardous. Instead, *Cachorro*’s matter-of-fact discourse of tolerance presents it as a straightforward source of physical pleasure between consenting adults. The potential risks are acknowledged by making the character of Pedro HIV-positive, and by implying his lover Eduardo died of an AIDS related illness. However, we are told that his (heterosexual, drug using) sister Violeta is also HIV-positive, a detail that belies the typical characterisation of HIV/AIDS as a

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<sup>453</sup> Klesse (2007: 59).

<sup>454</sup> Sánchez (no date) [accessed 30.11.07].

homosexual disease. Moreover, the presence and explicit use of condoms, a relative rarity not just in Spanish films but also in cinema as a whole, plays like a safe sex advert in the context of the practically pornographic opening sequence.

We may be put in mind here of the multitude of heterosexual sex scenes in Spanish cinema from the same period which take place between married or single characters who may or may not know the other's sexual history, that simply ignore the question of protection. In most sex scenes condoms, signifiers of the possible consequences of unprotected sex in real life such as pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted diseases are entirely absent as the romantic and/or erotic exigencies of the fiction take precedence. The heightened visibility of gay sexual encounters in *Cachorro* seems to address not just a queer audience but also a potentially homophobic mainstream audience, stressing that safe sex is a question of taking the necessary precautions out of respect for your sexual partners and yourself rather than the preserve of heterosexuals, Marriage or The Family.<sup>455</sup> At the same time unprotected sex in the 'post-AIDS' era has tended to be presented as having serious repercussions with films ranging from *Todo sobre mi madre* (1999) and *Antes que anochezca* (Julian Schnabel, 2000: USA) ultimately associating it with death. In *Cachorro* HIV is represented as a long-term health problem, but only one that becomes truly threatening when used as a weapon by others to blackmail the sufferer. Moreover, it is Pedro's probably well-warranted fear that society's inherent prejudices would ensure that if Doña Teresa alerted the authorities to his HIV status and sexual orientation he would not be awarded guardianship of his nephew, and that Bernardo would have to go through being put into care while any official decision was reached.

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<sup>455</sup> A government study's observation that heterosexual transmission has become the primary source of HIV infection in Spain in recent years is likely to come as a surprise to many, see MSC (2001) [accessed 23.1.09].

Cast in the mould of his namesake Peter Pan, the boy who did not want to grow up, or as Violeta puts it “una quinceañera salida [a su edad]”, Pedro is introduced as a reckless seeker of fun and adventure. The difficulties and complexities of renegotiating and modifying his lifestyle when he initially takes responsibility for Bernardo are made accessible through comically and romantically inflected exchanges. First in Pedro’s argument with Javi about rolling joints in front of Bernardo, and then in his marked uneasiness about making love to Manuel when his nephew is asleep in the next room. The compartmentalisation of his life is presented as Pedro’s temporary solution; likely to be familiar to any spectator juggling parenting responsibilities, a career, an active sex life and other personal interests. The closed door within the domestic sphere, and clearly gay-coded spaces such as clubs, cruising grounds or saunas, serve as physical manifestations and visual motifs of the moral and psychological boundaries Pedro puts in place.

The moment in the narrative when it becomes apparent that Violeta’s arrest will necessitate making Bernardo’s stay more permanent is marked by a sombre sequence that lasts for a minute and a half. Pedro’s visits to the Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores to deal with official paperwork punctuate vignettes of the corresponding private matters that need to be addressed, visually articulated by the alterations to create Bernardo a space of his own within his uncle’s home. The shift in mood and tempo creates a muted point of inflection in the film and a time for reflection. There is no dialogue; none is needed, as the melancholic tone of the diegetic soundtrack and non-diegetic piano and string melody signal that this is a period of mourning for both Pedro and Bernardo as they work to come to terms with Violeta’s absence and the prospect of their new life together. Meanwhile Albaladejo also makes use of the melodramatic device of the pathetic fallacy, as the characters’ inner turmoil is

channelled into stormy wind and rain that lashes at the windows of Pedro's flat. However, the following sequence eschews sorrow in favour of reinvention and transformation as Pedro, at Bernardo's behest, cathartically shaves off his nephew long hair. The message, "tenemos que seguir siendo fuertes, seguir viviendo y mantener el ánimo", forcefully delivered by Pedro and apt as a statement about The Postmodern Family, implies that social stasis induced by restorative nostalgia will get society nowhere. This shift is further emphasised by the mood of the final shot of this sequence. Standing side by side uncle and nephew contentedly observe themselves and each other in the bathroom mirror in a (re)imagining of a typical father-son portrait [Still 17]. Smiles replace the earlier tears and frustrations as a sound bridge links this positive reflection to the extract from *Peter Pan, el musical*.

Richard Dyer describes the mainstream musical, widely associated with gay cultures, as not so much concerned with realism, as with the plausible boundaries of the utopian imagination within entertainment.<sup>456</sup> He notes:

Entertainment offers the image of 'something better' to escape into, or something that we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don't provide. Alternatives, hopes, wishes – these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is *can be imagined* and maybe realized.<sup>457</sup>

He adds, however, that entertainment does not necessarily present models of utopian worlds; rather utopianism is "contained in the feelings that it embodies [...] what utopia *would feel like* rather than how it would be organized".<sup>458</sup> Working at this level of sensibility, this "something better", this one big happy alternative family, is

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<sup>456</sup> See Dyer (2002: 40).

<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 20. My italics.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 20. My italics.

expressed through the non-representational signs of the music, movement and rhythm of the theatrical interlude and the surprise party arranged by Pedro's bear friends that is imagined as euphoric and upbeat.

In the sequence where Pedro and Javi take Bernardo to see *Peter Pan, el musical* it is notable that as much screen time is devoted to a tracking shot of the theatregoers sitting watching as it is to the musical spectacle on stage. Complementing this focus on the audience Pedro, on leaving the theatre, expresses surprise that what he thought was an “obra infantil” had attracted so many gay spectators, an observation Javi dismisses with a matter-of-fact, “pues es normal, es un musical”. To unravel the significance of this sequence it is helpful to consider for a moment a stock description of *Peter Pan, el musical* as, “un espectáculo *familiar* apto para *todos* los públicos”.<sup>459</sup> Read in light of the above this becomes, albeit unintentionally, an exceptionally incisive observation about the assumptions surrounding spectatorship. Implicitly exclusive at the same time as it is explicitly inclusive this statement raises questions about heterogeneity and apparently conflicting identities. These discourses are central to the *Cachorro*'s modes of representation and address, and to its implied message: the need to recognise, and perhaps more importantly to accept the complexities of individual/familial/group identities.

Pedro is presented as a bear, a homosexual, a brother, an uncle, a friend, a lover, a middle-class homeowner, a dentist, a neighbour, an HIV sufferer, and guardian or a father figure – to mention just a few – and yet taken in isolation none of these labels define him. As Weeks puts it “we have multiple possible identities [...] each of which carries different, and often contradictory loyalties, claims and

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<sup>459</sup> Estrada (2005) [accessed 6.12.07]. My italics. The musical based on J. M. Barrie's play *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* (1904).



commitments”.<sup>460</sup> This theatre sequence addresses Pedro as the diegetic spectator, and us as the extra-diegetic spectator, implying that both should recognise that identities are multiple, constantly overlapping and shifting, meaning different things to different people at different points in time, and in different spaces and places. This is further stressed in Albaladejo’s exploitation of the stereotypical bear physique that also carries connotations of the paternal and the *macho ibérico*. This familiar physicality together with presenting Pedro as the voice of reason could be seen to work to domesticate or normalise the queer. At the same time the inclusion of graphic sex scenes queer what have traditionally been bastions of straightness in Spanish culture. This aspects is succinctly captured in the film’s English tagline, “parenthood is about to get a little hairier”, which plays on the multiple possible connotations of the qualifying adjective. Read in another way it might seem to be a rejection of the tendency to define identity in opposition to an ‘other’, supporting instead a recognition of identities as plural and inclusive.

*Cachorro* positions the spectator to (re)imagine expectations about parents, and the qualities and boundaries of child – parent/guardian relationships. The biological tie between parent (Violeta) and child (Bernardo) and the obligations this implies are shown not to be a guarantor of the stability so highly prized by The Neoconservative Family. Meanwhile, Pedro’s desire and capacity to look after Bernardo are presented as in no way dependent on the containment of his sex life within the ‘safe’ context of a more stable, monogamous relationship, such as that suggested by his French lover. The common perception of promiscuity has been that is is antithetical to love, intimacy and familial commitment, the “central values that

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<sup>460</sup> Weeks (1998: 45).

ultimately legitimise sexual acts or relationships in hegemonic moral regimes”.<sup>461</sup> Shunning the assimilationist romantic turn of gay male conservatism in the wake of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and the homophobic backlash that surrounded it, *Cachorro* chooses a protagonist who remains defiantly promiscuous and (homo)erotic. But the strength of the practical and emotional bond that forms between Pedro and Bernardo simultaneously works to persuade the spectator to accept that this is not detrimental to their commitment to each other.

Although *Cachorro* does resist containing Pedro’s sexual relationships within the familiar (heterosexual) romantic paradigm the film is arguably not devoid of romance. On first viewing, especially for a heterosexual audience, the generic label (comedia romántica) given to the film on the MCU database may seem misplaced or just plain wrong.<sup>462</sup> But on closer examination it is possible to (re)view Pedro’s fleeting (homo)sexual encounters, carefully presented as honest and respectful, as just, if not more romantically inflected than the more deceitful (hetero)sexual shenanigans of films like the Emilio Martínez Lázaro’s hit musical romcom *El otro lado de la cama* (2002) or Álvaro Fernández Armero’s *Juego de la verdad* (2004). The fact that heterosexual two-timing tends to fall inside the canon of what we call romance while Pedro’s homosexual polyamorous love stories do not, raises interesting questions about the persisting dominance of the heterosexual gaze in cinema production and reception. Furthermore, it might also be asked why we do not immediately identify the parent/guardian – child relationship forged between Pedro and Bernardo, the most central and captivating love story in *Cachorro*, as a romance when it is evidently (re)presented as such.

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<sup>461</sup> Klesse, (2007: 137).

<sup>462</sup> MCU [accessed 30.1.09].

In one beautifully tender and particularly brave sequence Albaladejo shows uncle and nephew sharing a bed after Bernardo admits he misses his mother at night.<sup>463</sup> The bed, until this point a signifier of Pedro's sexual desires and encounters, frames them as a long, slow tracking shot reveals their slumbering figures in the darkened room. Pedro's substantial form is contrasted with Bernardo's wiry little arm as he reaches over to hug his uncle stressing the vulnerability of the child met with a reassuring embrace. The spectator's knowledge and expectations of the characters by this point in the narrative desexualises both the situation and gaze. This, in turn, positions us to derive emotional rather than erotic pleasure from what is shown and what this implies, the place that Pedro makes in his heart, home and life for Bernardo. Nevertheless the prior erotic associations of the bed persist not as a (sexual) threat but as a subversive echo of transgression. Writing on the importance of transgressive moments Weeks has suggested they appear to be necessary if society is "to face the status quo with its inadequacies, to hold a mirror up to its prejudices and fears".<sup>464</sup> *Cachorro* challenges "anti-promiscuity stereotypes [that] are such an important element of anti-gay prejudice".<sup>465</sup> It also suggests that it is often the prejudices and fears surrounding sex and sexualities that society seems unable to voice that do the most damage, such as Doña Teresa's inferred but never explicitly stated objections to Pedro caring for Bernardo. In recognition of this *Cachorro* implies that this will condemn her to a life without what she desires most, the strength of love and affection that her grandson has for Pedro.

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<sup>463</sup> "Brave" due to the unfounded popular association of homosexuals with paedophilia, as discussed above.

<sup>464</sup> Weeks (1998: 37).

<sup>465</sup> Klesse, (2007: 59).

Parenthood has traditionally been the reserve of the heterosexual couple, ideally the biological progenitors, fulfilling the supposedly clearly gender specific roles of father and mother. *Cachorro* defies the assumption that an individual's sexual orientation has any bearing on his or her ability to parent; that is to perform the core duties of caring for and caring about a child. Seen as deviations from this norm "queer parenting" or "homoparentalidad" have at best been considered imperfect and at worst pathologised as "unhealthy" for the "normal" development of children.<sup>466</sup> *Cachorro*, while being open about Pedro's struggle to balance being a single, sexually active, homosexual man, also presents him as dedicated to wanting to fulfil his responsibilities as a surrogate parent. Pedro's reconciliation of this new role with his inner Peter Pan, with his inner child, is given a queer inflection, yet there is also a universality to the questions about (re)negotiating boundaries that this raises. Moreover, imagined as practical rather than moral, the dilemmas these (re)negotiations pose for the characters are represented as being easy to overcome in the context of relationships founded on love and respect. However, perhaps most striking is that the film seems to suggest that the monogamy families should be built upon is not necessarily that between an adult couple, whether hetero or homosexual, but rather between adults and the children they care for and care about.

#### **4.4 What About the Children?**

Much of the anxiety surrounding family change has focused on the potential impact it may have on children, with some of the fiercest debates going on between those trying to prove or disprove the adverse effects on children being brought up by a

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<sup>466</sup> For a discussion of the term "homoparentalidad" see Chemin (2007) [accessed 15.11.07].

non-heterosexual parent or parents.<sup>467</sup> Through the character of Bernardo and the relationship he develops with his uncle *Cachorro* engages with these discussions. This section will consider how editing, mise-en-scène and comedy are used to challenge the conservative preconceptions that children brought up by homosexuals are more likely to be sexually abused, may become confused about their own sexual orientation and that their psychological development is likely to be unbalanced because of the lack of necessary feminine and masculine references.<sup>468</sup>

The opening credit sequence of *Cachorro* candidly establishes Pedro's sexual orientation, while the mise-en-scène, framing, focus and editing start to engage the spectator visually in the debate about (homo)sexuality, children and parenthood. The third shot, less than twenty seconds into the sequence, is a close-up of a bedside table that reveals an image of childhood innocence, a photograph of a small child sitting in a toy aeroplane. Although unidentified it seems reasonable to assume in retrospect that it is either Pedro as a small boy or Bernardo when he was younger. Positioned in the centre of the frame the photograph draws the spectator's attention, but at the same time we become aware of the objects that surround it. Cigarette packets, a full ashtray, a mirror and tooter used for snorting cocaine, empty condom packets and lubricant, which, seen together signify a hedonistic lifestyle, at odds with what is considered a suitable environment for children. After only a couple of seconds the focus shifts blurring the image of the boy and allowing us to glimpse instead a man performing fellatio on another man reflected in the glass of the portrait. As the first image merges into the second, the figure of the child is physically replaced on screen by the reflection of an erect penis, while the sexually charged diegetic and non-diegetic

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<sup>467</sup> See Fontana Abad, Martínez Peroni, Polaino Lorente and Romeu (2005) [accessed 12.11.07], who list two hundred bibliographical sources from both sides of the debate.

<sup>468</sup> See González (2005) [accessed 13.11.07].

soundtrack set the erotic tone. In this moment, albeit fleetingly, the spectator is presented with a palimpsestic image of the social taboo of children's proximity to or implied involvement in (homo)sexual acts, which becomes a motif and motive for concern throughout the film.

Another particularly striking example is the sequence in which Pedro cruises the city on foot and by taxi in search of casual sex and the following sequence in which children mill around the gates of a primary school. The first sequence takes place at night, in the dark basement of a club and a dimly lit area under a bridge. Pedro and the men he encounters take the form of shadowy figures and silhouettes engaged in sexual acts that only become visible when sporadically illuminated by cigarette lighters or car headlights. A cut then takes the spectator to a scene shot in bright daylight as Bernardo arrives for his first day at a new school. The radically different subject matter and *mise-en-scène*, especially the lighting, stress the contrast between the two sequences. At the same time they are linked through the editing and by the presence of a Madrid taxi, which in the first sequence affords Pedro access to marginal spaces and greater sexual mobility and in the second carries Bernardo, Pedro 'the family man' and his teacher friend Juan to the school. These juxtapositions can seem charged with an uneasiness stemming from the "mis(identification) of homosexuality with paedophilia",<sup>469</sup> the product of homophobic, heterosexist discourses that perpetuate the stereotype of gay men as sexual predators predestined to be dangerous to children, a supposition based on prejudice rather than statistics.<sup>470</sup> In the context of Spanish cinema those spectators familiar with Almodóvar's work may fear in Pedro an echo of the paedophilic dentist (Javier Gurruchaga) from *¿Qué he*

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<sup>469</sup> Golder (2004: 63).

<sup>470</sup> Cossins (2000: 134), Golder (2004: 63) and Marshall (2004: 115).

*hecho yo para merecer esto!* Yet while these suspicions are alluded to through aesthetic choices, the developing narrative, positive representation of Pedro and his group of friends and of the relationship between uncle and nephew, work to make any such concerns seem ludicrous.

Albaladejo playfully addresses the assumptions that children growing up in ‘queer families’ are more likely to be confused about their own sexual orientation by encouraging the spectator to be mindful of dominant connotations. For example, when Bernardo selects pink paint for his new bedroom the ‘knowing’ look that passes between Pedro and his friends conforms to the mobilisation of this usually feminine-coded colour as a cultural signifier of homosexuality. The scene contains no dialogue; it is not necessary as the colour pink seemingly speaks for itself through socio-cultural associations. However, when Bernardo, who is developed as a precociously self-aware child, later tells his uncle in a matter-of-fact tone that he is fairly sure he is not gay, the spectator is encouraged to re-evaluate cultural assumption thereby challenging the relationship between signifier and signified. Ultimately Bernardo’s sexual orientation is defiantly left open by the film. As Pedro says about the matter: “Pues te puedes dar cuenta cuando eres un niño, o a los quince, a los veinte, a los treinta, a los cuarenta, puedes no darte cuenta nunca, incluso puedes no serlo”, presents homosexuality not as an aspect of oneself that is learnt, enforced or caught, but as something that one discovers in one’s own time.

In a twist to the nature-nurture debate, or the oft-recounted “coming out to one’s family” scenario, Bernardo’s heterosexual mother Violeta is convinced that her son is “gay de nacimiento” like her own brother. Although making visible and shunning the assumption that children should be socialised as heterosexuals, Violeta’s attitude towards Bernardo’s sexual orientation is presented more as just another

manifestation of her alternative lifestyle. Ironically, in trying not to be a “madre retrógrada” she simply replaces heteronormativity with homonormativity, choosing Bernardo’s coded clothes to reflect this. For example, when Pedro’s French lover Manuel’s sees Bernardo for the first time the boy is asleep on his uncle’s (pink) sofa wearing the pink pyjamas his mother chose for him. It is implied that it is the colour of Bernardo’s attire that prompts Manuel’s observation “tiene pluma”. By contrast Pedro is presented as consciously trying to take a more neutral approach. He first berates his sister and later his friend Javi for unnecessarily sexualising Bernardo though their treatment of him.

Pedro: ¿A ti no te importaría dejar de tratar a Bernardo como si fuese homosexual?

Javi: ¿Qué quieres que haga? ¿Qué lo trate como heterosexual?

Pedro: No. Como un niño que es lo que es. Alguien que no quiere acostarse ni con niños ni con niñas.

Although the tone of Javi’s tongue-in-cheek retort is comical, it also serves as a potent comment on what has been termed the “heterosexual assumption”, that which has traditionally played such a key role in shaping gender and sexual identities, in determining a sense of what are “appropriate” and “natural” ways of being in the world.<sup>471</sup> Meanwhile Pedro’s response serves to stress the sexualisation inherent in both the heteronormative and homonormative, raising the question as to whether either is desirable in adult’s socialisation of young children.

However, the irony is that despite his age Bernardo is presented as already having to deal with issues of sexuality on a daily basis in the context of another key site of socialisation, school. In one sequence Bernardo tells Pedro about Adrián, a boy

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<sup>471</sup> See Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001: 80), Dunne (1997: 11-18) and Connell (1995: 103-106).



that his classmates pick on because they think he is homosexual, a scenario that all spectators are likely to recognise from their school days. Later, after Bernardo has been sent to boarding school, Pedro is shown walking on a hill in Madrid's Casa del Campo, an area of the city well known for its (female and male) prostitutes. The sequence opens with a deep focus, extreme long shot showing Pedro looking down at the funfair that he and Manuel took Bernardo to visit; followed by a series of medium tracking shots linked by dissolves that capture the sexually inquisitive gazes of the other men that he passes in the park. But Pedro does not seem to be cruising for sex, as he was in earlier sequences, rather the sexually charged internal gaze that the situation infers is replaced by one charged with the desire to recapture happy times spent with his nephew. A right to left tracking shot then transports the viewer from the Casa del Campo to the playground of Bernardo's new school, where he is taking part in a typical childhood game. A young girl Lucía (Lucía González) wearing a blindfold spins around in the centre of a group of children; and we assume that she is then meant to kiss the fellow pupil (in this case Bernardo) whom she chooses at random. The soft wipe, used to link the medium tracking shot at the end of the first sequence to the beginning of the next, creates a subtle parallel between the sexually inquisitive gazes of the men in Casa del Campo and those of the children in the playground. Sobchack notes that infancy and childhood have come to be represented as "the cultural site of such 'positive' virtues as innocence, transparency, and a 'pure' and wonderful curiosity not yet informed by sexuality".<sup>472</sup> However the sexualised gazes of the first sequence echoed in the second remind the spectator, whether they are

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<sup>472</sup> Sobchack (1996: 148).

comfortable with the idea or not, that although characterised by naivety childhood is also a time of sexual awakening.<sup>473</sup>

It is widely acknowledged that The Family is one of the key regulatory discourses through which identities come to be gendered.<sup>474</sup> As Michael Kimmel explains “families raise children as gendered actors, and remind parents to perform appropriate gender behaviours”.<sup>475</sup> One of the main arguments levelled against ‘queer’ parenting is that the children brought up in such an environment are likely to become confused due to the lack of traditional clearcut male and female role models.<sup>476</sup> However, in light of the increasing prominence of equal opportunities discourses over the last twenty to thirty years in Spain, such destabilisation of prescriptive gender roles could, conversely, be embraced as part of a constructive shift towards a fairer society.<sup>477</sup> In *Cachorro* an aspect of Bernardo’s unconventional upbringing that is positively represented is the range of domestic skills his mother has taught him. As she explains to Pedro on the way to the airport:

Violeta: Y no le consientas que no te ayude en casa porque sabe hacerlo todo perfectamente. Te recoge la habitación, te pone la lavadora, y sabe cocinar de maravilla. Hace siete platos, uno para cada día de la semana.

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<sup>473</sup> Children’s emerging sexual curiosity is a common theme in film. In the context of Spanish film we can find examples in the many rites-of-passage or coming-of-age narratives including *Del rosa... al amarillo* (Manuel Summers, 1963), *El palomo cojo* (Jaime de Armiñán, 1995), *Secretos del corazón* (Montxo Armendáriz, 1997) and *Más pena que gloria* (Víctor García León, 2001).

<sup>474</sup> Chambers (2001: 26).

<sup>475</sup> Kimmel (2000: 121).

<sup>476</sup> The FEF [accessed 4.5.06], CONCAPA [accessed 21.6.06] and HazteOir [accessed 21.6.06] websites all express concern that many children raised in non-heterosexual households will not conform to conventional gender roles.

<sup>477</sup> These discourses have been embodied by the work of the Instituto de la Mujer (significantly part of the new Ministerio de Igualdad since 2008), that has been running “Reparto de responsabilidades domésticas” campaigns in the media since 1989, see IM (no date) [accessed 17.11.08] and Papí Gálvez (2006) [accessed 18.12.07].

Humour is used not only to stress the novelty of Bernardo's upbringing but also as a way of contrasting two generations of men. When Pedro tells a friend over the phone "Yo no sé cocinar, pero mi sobrino sí" the comedy lies in the absurdity of a familiar situation in Spain, that a full grown man who owns a flat, complete with a fully-equipped kitchen, has never learnt to cook. Yet, despite his shortcomings in the kitchen, Pedro is shown to possess other caring skills and in a closely framed medium shot of domestic harmony Bernardo peels fruit while Pedro takes clothes out of the washing machine [Still 18] presenting postmodern housekeeping as a shared project.

Implicit in representing Bernardo as able and willing to perform these simple household tasks is the more profound suggestion that any child can be socialised to become an adult capable of taking care of themselves and others. Through Bernardo the film puts forward a model of socialisation that sidesteps traditional preoccupations about learning to be a 'real' boy/man, and here the spectator might be reminded of what is expected of young Tete (Biel Durán) by this macho father (Abel Folk) in Juan José Bigas Luna's *La teta i la lluna* (1994). In *Cachorro* the focus falls instead on teaching children, regardless of their sex or gender, a range of practical and emotional skills. Pedro is presented as performing a number of overlapping roles including that of provider, nurturer and developer, who ensures Bernardo's social, emotional, intellectual and physical development and growth realms.

*Cachorro* defiantly proposes that, if a child is happy with the emotional and practical care that they receive, the sexual preferences and practices of their parent/guardian are rendered irrelevant. A suitable home environment for a child is presented as one in which the adult who is responsible for them finds a balance between their parenting responsibilities and their personal or sexual desires. *Cachorro* also works to suggest that positive changes, in terms of greater gender equality and

shared responsibility between the sexes, are more likely to be fostered in non-normative family environments. In this respect the film denaturalises nurturance as an innately feminine quality (re)presenting it instead as a learnt behaviour. In the film the power to authorise or legitimise The Postmodern Family lies primarily with Bernardo, the figure of the child that “bourgeois mythology has constructed a sign of the future that is sweetly traditional and safely adventurous, open yet closed”.<sup>478</sup> As such it is significant that Bernardo, a member of a new generation, is presented as actively wanting to live with Pedro and to build a future with him.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

As the tagline to Fejerman and París’s 2002 comedy *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* states “la familia ya no es lo que era”. This is a sentiment that Albaladejo not only elaborates but also celebrates in *Cachorro*, a film that imagines a potential democratisation of the meaning, practice and politics of family life by combining tradition and innovation, nostalgic and experimental elements. The film goes beyond questioning who can, or should, constitute The Family at the turn of the twenty-first century and focuses instead on what, in emotional and practical terms, should be attached to membership of supportive communities that may choose familial rhetoric to describe themselves. Borrowing from sociologist Lluís Flaquer it could be argued that what The Postmodern Family formed by Pedro and Bernardo lacks in “consistencia institucional” it makes up for in its “intensidad psicológica y emocional”.<sup>479</sup> At the same time, the structures of sympathy established by the film could be read as supporting Weeks’s contention that where “relationships are

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<sup>478</sup> Sobchack (1996: 148-149).

<sup>479</sup> Flaquer (1998: 201).

developed on the basis of choice rather than adscription, they are potentially stronger because they are freely chosen”.<sup>480</sup> In contrast to films like Gerardo Vera’s *Segunda piel* (1999), *Cachorro* presents homosexuality as wholly compatible with familial relationships. However, this is not to say that the film should be aligned with what Lisa Duggan has termed “new homonormativity”, that is, a neoliberal sexual politics that upholds and sustains heteronormative assumptions and institutions instead of contesting them.<sup>481</sup> Rather, working in the comic and melodramatic mode *Cachorro* challenges one of these institutions, The Traditional Family, by encouraging the spectator to question the heteronormative privilege on which it is founded.

Throughout Western societies questions surrounding queer families have grown both in visibility and symbolic importance around the turn of the millennium. Moreover, as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, embattled queer families have increasingly come to represent ideological sites of struggle, where the naturalised heteronormativity upon which The Family has traditionally been built has been contested. In Spain this process has been split, perhaps somewhat predictably, along a liberal – conservative line. Right-wing parties such as the PP refused during their mandate to legislate to afford greater protection to non-heterosexual kinship arrangements, while for left-wing parties such legislation was seen not only as necessary, but also as a very visible way in which to reinforce their liberal credentials. Although Albaladejo has made it clear in that he did not intend *Cachorro* to be a film “sobre héroes combativos que reclaman igualdad en todos los aspectos, o sea, no hay parejas de hecho ni leyes de adopción”,<sup>482</sup> he has also noted that “si puede ayudar a

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<sup>480</sup> Weeks (1998: 43).

<sup>481</sup> Duggan (2002: 179).

<sup>482</sup> Albaladejo (2004) [accessed 5.12.07].

quienes luchan por esos derechos, me parece bien”.<sup>483</sup> Moreover, while Albaladejo’s film does not demonstrate the kind of more overt informed or didactic mode of address found in Bollaín’s *Te doy mis ojos*, the tension created by combining affective storytelling and sexually explicit images firmly situates *Cachorro* within the wider contemporary political debate about parenting and The Neoconservative Family. Indeed, due in great measure to the film’s compelling melodramatic sensibility, it is a powerful addition to a diverse body of texts that constitute what could be termed, borrowing from Newcomb and Hirsch’s discussion of mass media, as a “cultural forum”.<sup>484</sup> That is, a textual, socio-cultural space or site of struggle where the dominant ideologies of The Traditional/Neoconservative Family are challenged and alternative models of intimacy, care and association can be imagined. The film’s utopian tone anticipates the prospect of a more tolerant society in which families and individuals would not be subjected to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Of particular interest is that Albaladejo’s affective mode of address seems to have struck a cord with audiences both queer and straight inside and outside Spain. On the basis of the geographical range of *Cachorro*’s release and distribution and of the people writing about the film on its IMDb message board it seems reasonable to conjecture that this is the most well-travelled of all the films under consideration here. Likewise it seems highly probable that the modest viewing figures given for *Cachorro* on the MCU database do not reflect this widespread international circulation and success.<sup>485</sup> Notably, *Cachorro* is the only film from the primary filmography of this

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<sup>483</sup> Ruiz Mantilla (2004b) [accessed 10.9.08].

<sup>484</sup> Newcomb and Hirsch (1994: 503-513).

<sup>485</sup> See IMDb Release Dates: *Cachorro* [accessed 24.3.09], IMDb Message Board: *Cachorro* [accessed 24.3.09] and MCU: *Cachorro* [accessed 24.3.09].

thesis that, at the time of writing, was readily available from mainstream retailer HMV on London's Oxford Street. Significantly it was being marketed as part of their selection of gay and lesbian films rather than of the 'world cinema' section. This is a fact that ties in with Minguell's observation that "*Cachorro* doesn't speak Spanish. It speaks the global language of consuming identities".<sup>486</sup> It may be useful then to look at how questions of the 'queer' and the 'nation' intersect through the medium of cinema. On this matter James Allan has observed that "film, as an evocative narrative form that moves easily across national and cultural boundaries, represents one opportunity for queer visibility, while also proving to be a powerful tool for constructing and reaffirming queer communities".<sup>487</sup> In the case of *Cachorro* familiar storylines and multiple transnational intertextual references are carefully woven together by the melodramatic sensibility at work in the film, helping to mediate its liberal, anti-essentialist discourse and make its queer vision of The Postmodern Family accessible to a wide audience.

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<sup>486</sup> Minguell (2005) [accessed 2.11.07].

<sup>487</sup> Allan (2001: 142).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### IN SEARCH OF HAPPY ENDINGS: HOMEPLACE, (BE)LONGING AND UTOPIAN SOLUTIONS IN ICÍAR BOLLAÍN'S *FLORES DE OTRO MUNDO* (1999) AND CHUS GUTIÉRREZ'S *PONIENTE* (2002)

#### 5.1 Introduction

Set against the backdrop of rural Castille *Flores de otro mundo* (henceforth *Flores*) tells the story of three women. Patricia (Lisete Mejía) a mulatta from the Dominican Republic and Marirrosi (Elena Irureta) a white woman from Bilbao both travel to the remote village of Santa Eulalia where the lonely men of the community have organised a “gran fiesta de solteros” in an attempt to find women willing to settle there. Patricia, a beauty technician and self-declared single mother, has been working illegally as a domestic help in Madrid to support her two young children, who she has had to leave behind in Santo Domingo. At the *fiesta* she meets a mild-mannered farmer Damián (Luis Tosar) whom she marries, thereby legalising her status and allowing her to be reunited with her children who also move to the village.

Meanwhile, a romance blossoms between Marirrosi, a middle-aged nurse and single mother of one, and plant nursery owner Alfonso (Chete Lera). She continues to live in Bilbao with her teenage son but regularly comes to stay with Alfonso at weekends.

Although clearly smitten he does not reciprocate these visits on the basis that he does not like the city, an attitude that soon creates a strain on their relationship. Milady (Marilyn Torres), the third woman, is a beautiful, young, black Cuban, trained as a sugar laboratory assistant, brought to the village by sex tourist Carmelo (José Sancho), the middle-aged, materialistic local builder who claims to want to marry her and start a family. Milady, however, has other plans, having left her homeland hoping to see the world and be reunited with her Italian lover Enrico. The narrative details the



practical and emotional problems faced by these three women over the course of a year as they try, with varying degrees of success, to make their new relationships and living arrangements work.

The second film that forms the analytical focus of this chapter is *Poniente*, the story of another divorced single mother, Lucía (Cuca Escribano), a primary school teacher who returns to her home village of La Isla in the province of Almería for the funeral of her estranged father. Determined to stay in her native Almería with her young daughter Clara (Alba Fernández) she decides to take on her father's tomato growing business. The narrative follows the difficulties and prejudices Lucía encounters in this male-dominated industry, her budding romance with Curro (José Coronado), and the mounting tensions in an environment that is home to a large number of illegal immigrant workers. Curro, a Spaniard brought up in Switzerland by parents who moved there as economic migrants in the sixties, earns an undeclared income working as an accountant for the local farmers. However, he dreams of setting up a *chiringuito* with his best friend Adbembi (Farid Fatmi), a North African *sin papeles* and greenhouse foreman. A strike organised by the immigrant labourers demanding that their employers help them legalise their situation strains already tense relations with the natives, and coincides with the escalation of a land dispute between Lucía and her cousin Miguel (Antonio Dechent). These situations come to a head during a night of vengeful racist violence perpetrated by the locals, which occasions an exodus of the local immigrant population.

Spain, like many other countries, has experienced and been shaped by continuous migratory flows. These include ongoing internal migration, predominantly from rural to urban areas, and a history of emigration, most recently in the form of the approximately two million Spaniards who left to work in Northern Europe during the

1960s and 70s.<sup>488</sup> However, since the early eighties, Spain has gone from being a source of immigrants to becoming a destination for them thanks to its growing economy, geographical location and membership of the European Community since 1986.<sup>489</sup> Statistics on the number of foreign nationals living and working in Spain are notoriously vague, partly due to the irregular status of many. However, estimates suggest that the figure of those legally residing in the country has risen from approximately 241,971 in 1985, when the *Ley de extranjería* was passed, to around 1.647,011 by 2003, the year after *Poniente* was released.<sup>490</sup>

The *Ley de extranjería*, legislation created specifically to regulate the entry of foreigners into Spain, only recognised immigration as a “temporary phenomenon”.<sup>491</sup> Establishing many restrictions and doing little to protect immigrants from exploitation, it was primarily designed to bring Spain into line with “Fortress Europe”.<sup>492</sup> Towards the end of the PP’s first term in office the 1985 *Ley* was due to be superseded by the *Ley Orgánica 4/2000 de 11 de enero, sobre derechos y libertades de los extranjeros en España y su integración social*, which stressed integration, promoted improved rights and had support across the political spectrum. However, the absolute majority won by the PP at the March 2000 general elections enabled them to move swiftly to halt the implementation of this more liberal law. They amended it with the more restrictive *Ley Orgánica 8/2000*, which was condemned by its opponents as constituting “[la] muerte civil” for illegal

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<sup>488</sup> See Hooper (2006: 13-25) on internal migration and Shubert (1990: 217-221) or Harrison and Corkhill (2004: 36-37) for an overview of post-war economic emigration flows.

<sup>489</sup> See Blanco (2000), Calavita (2005: 3-6), Geddes (2002: 149-172) and Izquierdo Escribano (1996).

<sup>490</sup> See Cornelius (2004: 387-388).

<sup>491</sup> International Organization for Migration (2004: 340). For general overviews of immigration policy in Spain see Pajares (1998: 193-217), Calavita (2005: 22-37 and 93-98) and Aja and Arango (Eds) (2006).

<sup>492</sup> See Prout (2006) for an analysis of the notion of “Fortress Europe” in relation to recent Spanish films.

immigrants.<sup>493</sup> Of particular interest to this study is the fact that one of the key amendments concerned the creation of much stricter preconditions for reuniting immigrant families.<sup>494</sup> These preconditions contradicted the PP's ostensibly pro-family stance, an inconsistency that can be read as an indication that The Neoconservative Family supported by the party in their policies and rhetoric remains resolutely white and Spanish.

As immigrant numbers have grown in Spain, images of nameless bodies washed up on the coasts of Andalusia and the Canary Islands and groups of immigrants cowering in boats and lorries intercepted by the police have become the staple fare of newspapers and television coverage. The now familiar accompanying phrases such as “*avalanchas* de sin papeles”, “*llegada masiva* de clandestinos” and “*la invasión migratoria*” function to intensify fear. Indeed, such (re)presentations of immigration as an overwhelming natural disaster, with undertones of an on-going war, seems to be intent on inviting readers and viewers to take up a position of defensive panic rather than informing them.<sup>495</sup> Any film dealing with this subject matter is therefore being made against a backdrop of Manichean reporting that typecasts immigrants, dehumanising, if not demonising them. However, as this chapter argues, the high emotional charge associated with this topic in the popular imagination is mobilised by the directors to elicit spectator concern and to deconstruct the perceived need to be defensive.

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<sup>493</sup> See Aguirre (2000) [accessed 22.1.08].

<sup>494</sup> Artículo 17 “Familiares reagrupables” of the *Ley Orgánica 4/2000* was replaced by Artículo 17 and the additional Artículos 18 “Procedimiento para la reagrupación familiar” and 19 “Efectos de la reagrupación familiar en circunstancias especiales” of the *Ley Orgánica 8/2000*. In accordance with strict European standards the PP further tightened restrictions in 2003, see the *Ley Orgánica 14/2003* and Ortega Pérez (2003) [accessed 28.1.08].

<sup>495</sup> Granados Martínez (2000) [accessed 26.1.08] provides detailed analysis of the construction of the figure of the immigrant in the Andalusian press, while Bañón Hernández (1996), Aierbe (2005) and Nash (2005) give useful nationwide overviews.

Although the socio-political implications of migration within, and emigration away from Spain have long constituted recurrent themes in films, Montxo Armendáriz was the first to focus sharply on the subject of immigration with *Las cartas de Alou* (1990), in which the sub-Saharan migrant Alou travels across the country in search of work and a better quality life. It is a film that Isabel Santaolalla describes as confronting cinemagoers with “una realidad social que ya llevaba tiempo siendo visible en las calles”.<sup>496</sup> From the mid-nineties onwards an increasing number of *largometrajes* from Spain and across Europe have placed immigrant characters at the centre of their narratives and/or demonstrated a preoccupation with issues relating to immigration.<sup>497</sup> Examples from Spain made between 1996 and 2004 range from *Bwana* (Imanol Uribe, 1996), a black comedy that delivers a humanitarian message, to the subtle television film *Las hijas de Mohamed* (Silvia Munt, 2003), and Helena Taberna’s documentary *Extranjeras* (2003).<sup>498</sup> Studies of this group of texts make up one of the most rapidly growing bodies of critical analysis amongst recent scholarship on Spanish cinema.<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> Santaolalla (2005: 23). A pioneer in research on representations of race and ethnicity in Spanish cinema, Santaolalla has analysed these aspects in a series of articles (1999), (2002), (2003a), (2003b) and (2004), and in an extensive monograph (2005).

<sup>497</sup> See Gordillo Álvarez (2008) [accessed 2.12.08], for a detailed study of the growing number of *cortometrajes* that also deal with the subject of immigration and Spain’s ethnic minorities. Studies that have discussed filmic representations of immigrants in the context of other European national cinemas, albeit briefly, include Higbee (2005: 317-321) on France, and Street (2009: 119-124 and 138-142) on Britain. See also Rings and Morgan-Tamosunas (Eds) (2003) and Pisters and Staat (Eds) (2005) for collections of essays that cover the subject in relation to films from a variety of European countries.

<sup>498</sup> For a more comprehensive overview of these and other examples see Santaolalla (2005: 119-225) and Elena (2005).

<sup>499</sup> See, for example, Molina Gavilán and Di Salvo (2001), Martín-Cabrera (2002), Martín Márquez (2002), Nair (2002) and (2004), Flesler (2004), Castiello (2005), Kim (2005: 171-189), Ballesteros (2001: 205-232), (2005) and (2006), Berger (2007), Damerou (2007), García-Alvite (2007), Valerio-Holguín (2007), Song (2008) and Van Liew (2008), in addition to the texts by Santaolalla and Elena already cited above.

With the exception of Yeon-Soo Kim's detailed analysis of the promotion of multiculturalism through family photography in *Flores*, dealt with below, this scholarship only briefly touches on the varied but central role that family plays in many of these films.<sup>500</sup> Examples of this role include the never-seen family members to whom letters are written in *Las cartas de Alou*; what Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas have described as the "cowardice and inherent xenophobia of the typical middle-class Spanish family" in *Bwana* that is also evident in *A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* (Fejerman and Paris, 2002);<sup>501</sup> the desperately missed family with whom the Romanian protagonist of *El sudor de los ruseñores* (Juan Manuel Coteló, 1998) dreams of being reunited; the hypocrisy of "la retórica de la gran familia hispanoamericana" that Gutiérrez Aragón wanted to reveal in *Cosas que dejé en La Habana* (1998);<sup>502</sup> the emergence of often alternative families created by migrants of similar or different ethnicities who are brought together by circumstance, adversity and necessity in films like *En la puta calle* (Enrique Gabriel, 1996) and *Saïd* (Soler, 1999); and the diverse experiences of different generations within immigrant families explored in *Extranjeras*. Family, then, is represented in these films as one of, if not *the* most powerful driving factors of migratory flows. Even when physically absent, immigrants' families 'back home' remain emotionally present in these films. When read together, *Flores* and *Poniente* not only touch on all of these aspects but are also particularly interesting because of the way in which they frame representations of (im)migration with intimate questions of family, home, and belonging.

Citing the aforementioned group of films made between 1996 and 2004, as well as other examples from across Europe, Ballesteros argues that "immigration

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<sup>500</sup> See Kim (2005: 171-189).

<sup>501</sup> Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas (1998: 100).

<sup>502</sup> Santaolalla (2005: 189), quoting Gutiérrez Aragón.

film” could already be considered to be a genre.<sup>503</sup> On one hand, this generic category could be seen as a way of helping scholars to raise the profile of representations of ethnic diversity that were previously marginalised in national and transnational cinemas. On the other hand, however, care should be taken to ensure that such a category does not become a thematic ghetto that (re)produces the existing marginalisation and homogenisation of immigrants within the Spanish media, or threaten to eclipse the varied modes of representation and address discernible in the individual films concerned. Indeed, Maria Van Liew has more usefully described immigration films as a heterogeneous group of texts characterised by their generic fluidity as they blend elements of “social realism, romance, thriller, road trip/odyssey, bittersweet comedy with ‘new’ social developments”.<sup>504</sup> The combining of expressive modes, implied by this kind of generic fluidity, when bound together with an evident intent to engage critically with the social is typical of *cine social*, another category to which *Flores* and *Poniente* are usually assigned.

Aspects of *Flores* and *Poniente* not only engage with the ‘new’ social development of immigration but also echo real events that took place in the remote village of San Juan de Plan in the Aragonese Pyrenees and the Almerian municipality of El Ejido respectively.<sup>505</sup> Nevertheless, rather than simply endeavour to recreate or document, these films demonstrate Bollaín and Gutiérrez’s determination, as directors

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<sup>503</sup> Ballesteros (2005: 4).

<sup>504</sup> Van Liew (2008: 261).

<sup>505</sup> *Flores* takes inspiration from the *solteros* of San Juan de Plan, who, after watching William A. Wellman’s *Westward the Women* (1951) on the television in 1985, decided to invite women from all over Spain to come to their village in the hope that some would stay, marry and have children, and therefore save the village from “extinction”. See Marin (1985) [accessed 13.7.09]. Meanwhile *Poniente*’s narrative is reminiscent of the heightened tensions and racist riots that gripped El Ejido in February 2000, when disputes over poor working conditions and accommodation were aggravated by the murders of three locals by two different immigrant workers. See Cabrera and Villaverde (2000) [accessed 13.7.09].

and co-writers, to try to understand such events and to respond to them.<sup>506</sup> When talking about the creative process both filmmakers place an emphasis on their detailed personal research of the subject matter and their desire to share what they have learnt through character-driven narratives, potentially giving their films greater credibility by presenting their mode of address as inquisitive and informed.<sup>507</sup> However, the clearly melodramatic narratives of love, separation and loss around which the films are built would seem to be examples of what Belén Vidal has described as “the desire to have an impact in the real world through affective storytelling”.<sup>508</sup> *Flores* combines interracial and same-race romances with family drama and comical elements, *Poniente* moves between romance and drama on a personal and public scale, while both films also include pivotal interracial ‘buddy’ subplots and employ a melodramatic sensibility to frame issues of immigration. This chapter considers how, together with the wider melodramatic sensibility at work in the films, the structure of sympathy constructed through this mode of narration establishes a “moral legibility” that attempts to challenge both ingrained racism and The Neoconservative Family.<sup>509</sup>

As explored in the previous chapters, *Solas*, *Te doy mis ojos* and *Cachorro*, with their relatively small casts and compact narratives, can be seen to raise questions about how The (nuclear) Neoconservative Family is being (re)presented and (re)imagined at the turn of the twenty-first century. This chapter proposes that *Flores* and *Poniente* deal with similar issues, but also suggests that their focus on immigration, multi-stranded narratives, and large ensemble casts that give the films a

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<sup>506</sup> Bollain co-wrote *Flores* with the novelist Julio Llamazares, while Gutiérrez collaborated with Bollain.

<sup>507</sup> See Bollain, Llamazares and Rodríguez (2000: 64-70) and Sartori (2002) [accessed 7.1.05].

<sup>508</sup> Vidal (2008: 221).

<sup>509</sup> In his discussion of melodrama Peter Brooks argues that it “becomes the principal mode for uncovering, demonstrating, and making operative the essential moral universe in a post-sacred era” (1995: 15).

strongly choral dimension, invites an expansion of these questions to wider kinship groups and the imagined community of the national family.

## 5.2 The Home Front: Difference, Danger and the Domestic

Much has been written about the relationship between the concepts of family and home and that of nation. For example, Benedict Anderson has argued that the rhetorics of kinship and home have been mobilised to denote the nation as something to which one is “naturally” tied;<sup>510</sup> Nikos Papastergiadis has claimed that the nation’s symbols and narratives can only truly resonate when they are “admitted into the chamber of the home”;<sup>511</sup> Anne McClintock has suggested that The Family functions as a fundamental metaphorical figure through which national difference can be moulded into “a single historical genesis narrative”;<sup>512</sup> and Phil Cohen has commented on the ease with which the boundaries of state and nation are “pinned to those of the neighbourhood and family within the single rhetorical space of race”.<sup>513</sup> This close identification of national and domestic space is nowhere as apparent as in the discourses surrounding immigration. This section will examine how and to what effect Bollaín and Gutiérrez use the home as a physical and ideological figure to explore the perceived threat posed by foreigners.

Following Mary Douglas’s work on dirt and defilement, David Morley suggests that “just as the home may be profaned by the presence of dust or mud (or a

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<sup>510</sup> Anderson (2000: 144).

<sup>511</sup> Papastergiadis (1998: 4).

<sup>512</sup> McClintock (1995: 357). Discussing the challenges faced by Catalan nationalism during the dictatorship, Montserrat Guibernau i Berdun argues that the Francoist regime sought to extend the powerful intimacy of family relationships into the political sphere by mobilising the emotionally charged term *patria* because, “just as a well-behaved child would never endanger or dare to offend his or her mother, so the Spaniards had to unite in their loyalty to the motherland” (2004: 44).

<sup>513</sup> Cohen (1996: 69).



particular space within it profaned by the presence of an object properly belonging to another space), similarly the homeland may be profaned by the presence of strangers”.<sup>514</sup> In *Flores* this sentiment resonates in the words and behaviour of two of the very few women in the *pueblo*, Aurora (Chiqui Fernández), the landlady of the local bar, and Gregoria (Amparo Valle), Damián’s mother. Both are strongly identified with rural life, are presented as symbolic guardians of the traditional ‘Spanish’ home, and articulate their resistance to Patricia and Milady in terms of what they perceive to be a disruption of their domestic space. Villages, as David Sibley suggests, tend to be (re)presented as being home to the unchanging, culturally homogenous spirit of a nation, where heterogeneity has to be suppressed or denied if they are to symbolise the imagined community.<sup>515</sup> Gregoria and Aurora’s understanding of home and community seems to be of a very specific, bounded space and they exercise what they see as their right to defend it by summarily excluding anything that destabilises the status quo.

Despite the sacrifices Patricia makes and the hard work she invests to integrate into the household that she marries into, the domestic sphere becomes an increasingly contested space for her due to Gregoria’s resistance to compromise or change. The most severe confrontations between the two women take place in the kitchen, which, as discussed in chapter three, is a space loaded with significance due to its traditional status as the hearth and heart of the home. When Patricia’s friends Daisi (Doris Cerdá), Graciela (Ada Mercedes) and her aunt Lorna (Ángela Herrera) visit the old-fashioned rural kitchen, over which Gregoria usually presides with austerity, it is transformed as they prepare a typical Dominican meal together. The tropical rhythms

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<sup>514</sup> Morley (2000: 143).

<sup>515</sup> Sibley (1997: 108).

of “Así que muévelo”, a song by Ilegales del Caribe, exotic ingredients such as plantains, and the brightly coloured clothing of Patricia’s guests fill the kitchen, signifying the movement of culture, goods and people in a modern, globalised world. Damián contributes to proceedings with actions instead of words by bringing two freshly slaughtered chickens to Patricia. Pointedly positioned at the threshold of the room, Gregoria’s only input is to affirm her displeasure at the visitors’ arrival. Gregoria perceives their presence as an invasion of her home, and after they leave she issues an ultimatum to Patricia:

- Gregoria: No quiero volver a ver esas mujeres en esta casa. ¿Me has oído?
- Patricia: Mire señora, esas mujeres son mi gente, son mi familia y donde esté yo nunca les faltará un plato.
- Gregoria: Mientras estés en mi casa, las cosas se hacen a mi manera. Y si no te gusta, ya sabes dónde está la puerta.
- Patricia: ¿Me quiere decir qué tiene contra mí, qué le he hecho yo? Siempre la he tratado con respeto, hago mi trabajo, hago la compra, voy a los recados...

With the authority of a mistress addressing her slave, or a parent their young child, Gregoria interrupts Patricia with the shouted response “Yo ya he dicho lo que tenía que decir”. This is a statement and mode of delivery that is symptomatic of what Kim describes as the native residents’ tendency to view immigrants within “an obsolete colonialist framework” and of their refusal to compromise or enter into dialogue.<sup>516</sup>

In *Flores* food is repeatedly used to stress otherness, with Gregoria making disparaging remarks about the food Patricia cooks. Moreover, rather than broadening the scope of the (Spanish) culinary system by incorporating Patricia’s Dominican-recipes, she pointedly prepares separate food for herself and Damián. In the sequence

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<sup>516</sup> Kim (2005: 175).

where Damián expresses surprise that the beans his wife has prepared “No tienen caldo”, Patricia responds “Las habichuelas se hacen así, mi vida”. As she speaks shallow focus blurs Gregoria and the kitchen in the background uniting them behind Patricia who, although in the foreground appears alienated, her discomfort literally brought into sharp focus. She receives her mother-in-law’s comment, “Las judías de toda la vida de Dios se hacen con caldo”, with silent indignation as she looks across at Damián, who does nothing to support her. This exchange is symbolic, not just of two different ways of cooking, but more fundamentally of the tensions created when two cultures meet. The variation in the word used for bean and whether they should be served with broth or not encapsulates how ‘norms’ are culturally specific constructs, not god-given truths as Gregoria’s authoritative statement would seem to suggest.

Aurora, the owner of the local bar, also gives her opinion of Patricia:

- Aurora: Como la de Damián, que como se descuide le va a sacar hasta los hígados.
- Alfonso: No mujer, eso es distinto. Ella tiene a los hijos aquí. Eso es otra cosa.
- Aurora: Es peor, porque ya se casó y son suyos también y si quiere puede traerse la familia entera
- Alfonso: ¿Y cuál es el problema con eso?
- Aurora: Tssss. Que yo no tengo nada contra esta gente. Yo sólo digo que cada oveja con su pareja y cada cual en su casa.

Using proverbs that have their origin in medieval village values, Aurora’s discriminatory attitude and words reduce Patricia and other immigrants, whose individual stories, names, faces, and voices she disregards with the homogenising term “esta gente”, to parasites who will attack and drain the vital organs of the host

society.<sup>517</sup> Echoing the common (mis)conceptions of racist rhetoric Aurora's concern that Patricia may bring her whole family to Spain seems to rest on the supposition that "to house one such [immigrant] family here today will mean having to live with a thousand like them tomorrow."<sup>518</sup> Significantly when Aurora is challenged by Alfonso as to why this would be a problem, she does not give a straight answer, choosing instead to run together two popular idioms, "Cada oveja con su pareja" and "Cada cual en su casa y Dios en la de todos". Although the latter part of the second proverb is omitted, the religious associations remain clear, indicating its long history and adding to its pseudo-authority. The composite 'proverb' that she creates mobilises the figure of the home to suggest that people should be put in their place according to their race, directly contradicting the welcome banner that greeted the women at the beginning of the film, "Hola estáis en *vuestra* casa".<sup>519</sup> Roland Barthes says of proverbs that they "represent active speech which has gradually solidified into reflexive speech, but where reflection is curtailed"; as such they masquerade as statements of fact or popular wisdom and justify what is presented as an "unalterable hierarchy of the world".<sup>520</sup> Aurora's proverb splicing serves to intensify this effect to an almost comical degree: so intent is she on avoiding reflection and clinging to conventions that she prefers to bend tradition to suit her argument. Her tactic is an instant success. One 'proverb' leads to another, and any potential for further discussion is prematurely ended, as one of her listeners laughs and begins a sing-song

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<sup>517</sup> These kind of sentiments are embedded within the resolutely anti-immigration stance of Francisco Pérez Corrales and Manuel Canduela of Spanish extreme-right party Democracia Nacional and José Luis Roberto of España 2000, political parties and individuals ideologically allied to Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National in France, the Vlaams Blok party in Belgium and the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs in Austria.

<sup>518</sup> Cohen (1996: 74).

<sup>519</sup> My italics.

<sup>520</sup> Barthes (2000: 154).

recitation of another popular saying, “Quien lejos va a casar, o va engañado, o va a engañar”, that reiterates Aurora’s distrust of engaging with outsiders.

Aurora and Gregoria are similarly disparaging about Milady, who befriends Patricia on her arrival in Santa Eulalia. After Milady visits her new friend at home Gregoria complains to Damián, expressing her objections in terms of the domestic:

Gregoria: La de Carmelo estuvo aquí esta mañana [...] A saber cómo tendrá la casa ésa, todo el día por allí. Sabe Dios lo que le habrá enseñado su madre; a tratar con hombres, seguro.

Damián remains mute, while Gregoria frames her criticism of Milady in terms of the traditional patriarchal order that binds women to the home and associates female mobility outside the house with sexual promiscuity. Notably, no-one passes any such moral judgement on Carmelo, whose mobility in the public sphere is expected and whose sex tourism remains unchallenged. Gregoria’s words, infused with traditional notions of the feminine, equate domestic order and cleanliness with female chastity, good Catholic morals and, implicitly, racial purity. By using the typical Spanish construction “la de...” Gregoria also eclipses Milady as an individual reducing her to “she who is defined by belonging to man”. In addition, Gregoria’s comment draws on the historical stereotype of women of colour as highly sexual beings in need of ‘domestication’ by white men.<sup>521</sup> This is a stereotype already established by Carmelo’s description of the Dominican women at the *fiesta de solteros*, “las morenitas son más fáciles para hablar. Bueno, para hablar y para todo ¿sabes? Porque les gusta”, and the comment of one of the *viejos* as Milady passes by, “¡como no la dome pronto...!”. These remarks invoke Milady’s body as an exotic ‘dark continent’,

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<sup>521</sup> For a thought-provoking discussion of *Flores* in relation to the tradition of over-sexualising women of colour, see Martín-Cabrera (2002: 50-53).

to be sexually conquered (colonised) and then domesticated.<sup>522</sup> However, by showing her flight and leaving the outcome of her story open, this is a fate that the film denies or at least defers.

Media and political discourses often present immigrants as a threat to the way and quality of life in Western Europe, however, as David Corkhill points out, there is growing evidence that they are in fact enabling existing high living standards to be maintained.<sup>523</sup> Indeed, a number of recent academic and government studies carried out in Spain have reached the conclusion that the country needs immigrants, amongst other reasons, to help rejuvenate and provide for an aging workforce and sustain economic growth.<sup>524</sup> Through a range of visual and narrative strategies *Flores* and *Poniente* endorse such findings, thereby promoting a strong emotional allegiance with individual immigrant characters and encouraging the spectator to recognise the selfish exploitation that racist discourses often mask.

In Spain the influx of female immigrants taking on domestic work, especially in urban areas, has helped to emancipate many middle-class Spanish women from the domestic, but this is most often achieved at the expense of immigrant women's liberties. In *Flores* female immigrants willing to settle down and have families in isolated farming communities are presented as a viable and a quite literally attractive solution to rural depopulation and falling birthrates in Spain. It is inferred that Patricia and Milady have little choice but to undertake 'women's work' in order to gain legal residency in Spain. The film first carefully elicits the spectator's respect and concern for Patricia by establishing her as a selfless, dedicated mother and a hard-working

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<sup>522</sup> On the "dark continent" as a signifier of female sexuality and race in cinema see Doane (1991: 209-248).

<sup>523</sup> Corkhill (2001: 828).

<sup>524</sup> Examples include research by Corkhill (2001), Collado, Iturbe-Ormaetxea and Valera (2004), Dolado (2004) [accessed 4.9.08] and Fernández Cordón (2004).

individual. This characterisation then intensifies the spectator's outrage and disgust when she tells Milady about the poor pay and working hours far beyond the legal maximum that she experienced as a live-in domestic help in Madrid. Her story serves as a compelling illustration of how women have come to constitute a gendered underclass amongst the country's immigrant population as, in comparison to men, the work available to them is limited almost exclusively to 'feminine' domestic tasks. Moreover, as Carlota Solé and Sònia Parella argue, the "invisibility, insecurity and exploitation" that tends to characterise both legal and illegal immigrants, is often made more acute by the female immigrants' location within the private rather than the public sphere.<sup>525</sup>

One of the most trenchant criticisms of mainstream feminism in recent years has focussed on its inability or unwillingness to tackle the "silence about the gulfs that divide women precisely on the basis of race, class, and national positioning".<sup>526</sup> *Flores* addresses this gulf by following the stories of three women who, although they ostensibly find themselves in a similar position, have very different options open to them as a result of their origins. Milady's choices seem limited to loveless relationships and submissiveness, or a precarious existence as an illegal immigrant trying to make her own way in a strange land. However, not only does she run away from the legal bond with Carmelo that would have given her, in Aurora's words, "el dinero y los papeles", but she also decides against relying on the infatuated builder's mate Oscar (Rubén Ochandiano) who helps her escape. Her struggle to decide whether or not to go alone is portrayed as a moral dilemma, from which she emerges

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<sup>525</sup> Solé and Parella (2003: 68). For a further discussion of immigrants and domestic labour in Spain and the types of relationship that are established between immigrant women and their (female) employers see Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2009).

<sup>526</sup> McClintock, Mufti and Shohat (1997: 7).

with her integrity. Patricia's choices are arguably even more limited because the desire to be reunited with her children takes precedence over everything else, as she explains to Damián: "Yo estoy mirando por mis hijos, ¿entiendes?". She settles in Santa Eulalia to the detriment of any professional aspirations, as what is required from her is only what she can offer by fulfilling the traditional roles of wife and mother. It is significant that she, the only one of the three female protagonists to remain in the village, ends up accepting conditions that, on the surface at least, conform most closely to those of The Traditional Family. Marirrosi, as a woman, single mother and Other, in this case a Basque, one of Spain's internal Others, is presented as having elements in common with Patricia. However, as a white, middle-class Spaniard she has a wider range of choices open to her. Despite her love for him, Marirrosi eventually decides not to leave her independent life in the city to live with Alfonso, perhaps, as Martin Márquez suggests, because she "may be too familiar with the ultimate price of that domesticity for women to settle for it".<sup>527</sup> By including Marirrosi and Alfonso's love story alongside that of Milady and Patricia, *Flores* shows how female immigrants are often caught in a double bind of discrimination, as women and ethnic Others.

If in *Flores* the focus falls on women immigrants, in *Poniente* it is male immigrants who are presented as providing cheap, 'flexible' labour and accepting manual or menial jobs in the public sphere that Spain's rapidly expanding middle-class no longer wants to do.<sup>528</sup> On the one hand, the film presents this affluent class as

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<sup>527</sup> Martin Márquez (2002: 268).

<sup>528</sup> In 2002, the year *Poniente* was released official statistics gathered from Oficinas de Empleo show that 1,326,567 work contracts were taken up by legal foreign workers. Of these 55.48% were in the (unskilled) service sector, 20.17% in construction, 16.91% in agriculture and 7.54% in industry. 90.85% were temporary contracts and only 9.15% were permanent, see MTAS (2003b) [accessed 28.1.08]. However, statistics of legal contracts only reveal part of the overall picture as many illegal migrants are employed in the underground economy.



taking their superior position for granted. On the other, it highlights the vital role that male immigrants, often working illegally, play in the local economy of agricultural areas like Almería. For example, the link between Lucía's cousin Miguel's prosperity and the exploitation of the immigrant Other is succinctly implied by a cut from a long shot of him sitting at home surrounded by signifiers of a comfortable middle-class lifestyle, to another long shot of immigrants crowding around vans desperately pleading to be chosen to work that day. The often hidden or ignored human cost of such affluence is quite literally brought home to Miguel and the spectator, not by means of an ethical epiphany, but rather through the melodramatic twist of the death of his son because he ordered the arson attack on Lucía's greenhouses. Useful here is Martha Vicinus's observation that in melodrama the death of an innocent child is often used to chastise the powerful for their "moral carelessness".<sup>529</sup> In light of the thousands of immigrant lives that are being lost each year as they try to make their way to Europe, it is arguably problematic that *Poniente* chooses instead to depict the tragic death of a white Spanish teenager. However, as the death of an immigrant would mean little or nothing to Miguel and the 'powerful' class of Spaniards he represents, it is the death of a member of their own (biological and national) family that is necessary to illustrate the devastating consequences of their moral carelessness.

In *Poniente* it is through Lucía and Curro that many of the film's events and the spectator's view of immigrant characters is, to use Seymour Chatman's terms, "filtered" and "angled".<sup>530</sup> That is to say that theirs are the prevailing consciousnesses through which the film works not only perceptually but also attitudinally and

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<sup>529</sup> Vicinus (1981: 130).

<sup>530</sup> Chatman (1986: 196-197). Chatman argues that alone or in combination "filter" and "angle"/"slant" along with "center" and "interest-focus" more adequately capture the perceptual, cognitive, emotive and ideological dimensions that are obfuscated by the narrowly visual connotations of "point-of-view" or Gérard Genette's term "focalisation".

emotionally orientate the spectator. As with *Cachorro* it is debatably problematic that *Poniente* chooses to provide the spectator with ‘safe’ figures, in this case white, middle-class Spaniards, to be their visual and ideological guides through this narrative about immigration. However, like Pedro in *Cachorro* they are presented as inhabiting privileged yet marginalised social positions. As white Spaniards they should belong but are presented as estranged from the national family because of their willingness to treat immigrants as equals rather than as nameless and expendable commodities, and, in Curro’s case because of the years he lived outside Spain. With his comment, “A ti los suizos te estropearon”, Miguel brands Curro, an *emigrante retornado*, as a damaged Spaniard.<sup>531</sup> This attitude is taken a step further during the violent climax of the narrative when Miguel states “Los amigos de los moros sois peores que ellos” and the local bar owner accuses Curro of being a traitor. His crime would seem to be “treason to whiteness”.<sup>532</sup> Historically, whiteness has been synonymous with privilege made possible in part by the denigration and suppression of racial and cultural differences, suppression upon which a collective Spanish identity has been constructed. Lucía and Curro’s acceptance of the immigrants they encounter and their evident discomfort at the racism they witness function as signifiers of a moral integrity and enlightened outlook that, it is implied, are the natural result of a desirable further education and a greater knowledge of the world.

Both *Flores* and *Poniente* are good illustrations of Xabier Aierdi et al’s contention that “cuando prestamos atención al fenómeno de la inmigración lo que en

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<sup>531</sup> See Losada Álvarez (2004) for a discussion of returning Spanish (Galician) emigrants.

<sup>532</sup> “Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity” is the motto of the journal *Race Traitor* co-founded by Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey, academics and activists who seek to eliminate white privilege by working towards the abolition of the white race, see *Race Traitor* [accessed 7.2.08].

realidad hacemos es interrogarnos por nuestros miedos e inseguridades”.<sup>533</sup> The presence of North African immigrants in Spain has, as Daniela Flesler points out in a discussion of filmic texts about Moroccan immigrants, rekindled the problem of “its own hybrid identity as a nation”, with cultural reactions and representations revealing “less about the real lives of the newcomers and more about Spain’s anxiety regarding its own liminal location on the African European border”.<sup>534</sup> This “location uneasiness”, as Flesler calls it, is latent throughout *Poniente*, and made explicit in the discussions between Curro and Adbembi. The latter’s explanation of what it means to be a Berber functions to inform both Curro and the audience that the generic term *árabe*, like *moro* is misleading and often used incorrectly, homogenising what is actually a very heterogeneous North African immigrant population. Curro, whose emigrant family background means that he can never feel entirely at home either in Switzerland or in Spain, is fascinated by Adbembi’s description, exclaiming: “Tienes suerte de tener raíces”. Adbembi replies “Mis raíces son tus raíces, nuestros ancestros fueron los mismos, España fue un país bereber durante muchos siglos.” Curro and Adbembi are shown here in a two shot, in contrast to the shot/reverse shots predominant in much of the rest of the film. This visual strategy reinforces their partnership, both as friends and in reference to their hoped for business venture, as well as reminding us that Spain is the result of a mixture of cultures and races.

However, despite, or perhaps precisely because of this historical fact, most of the local residents in *Poniente*, especially the tomato cultivators who are most dependant on the immigrant population, are presented as unwilling to even countenance the possibility of cohabitation on equal terms. The *cortijos*, where the

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<sup>533</sup> Aierdi, Álvarez, Bonelli, Wagman and Garaizabal (2004), back cover.

<sup>534</sup> Flesler (2004: 104).

“wanted but not welcome” immigrant workers live, are hidden amongst the maze of plastic greenhouses so that they are physically and socially remote from the village.<sup>535</sup> They exemplify the ethnic ghettos that have been allowed to grow up in spaces and places where outsiders remain at a remove from more affluent sections of the native population and those in power. The *Ley Orgánica 4/2000* only protects foreigners who reside in Spain legally, and as a result, it is easy for local communities to refuse those ‘without papers’ access to a physical (and symbolic) home, thereby forcing immigrant populations to inhabit a marginal space in society. Lucía, who finds a *cortijo* by accident after getting lost in her van, fittingly articulates this isolated (dis)location as “el fin del mundo”, to the immigrant who (ironically) is able to tell her how to get back to her native village, La Isla. The very name chosen for the village seems to indicate the narrow-minded, ‘insular’ mentality of its inhabitants. Lucía is then shown re-entering the village where she witnesses Saïd (Marouane Mribti) and Ahmed (Saïd Boudhinz), who on the advice of a young local have gone to try to rent a flat, being forcibly removed from a building by Joaquín. He insists that it has already been sold, but it is made clear that he would rather have it empty than occupied by immigrants. This issue resurfaces in a later angry exchange when Miguel asks, “¿Tú sabes por qué nadie os alquila casas?” to which Adbembi replies, “Sí, porque somos unos cerdos, olemos mal. Nos metemos diez en un piso y lo destrozamos todo, pero sobre todo porque no soportáis vernos cerca de lo vuestro. En realidad os gustaría que fuéramos invisibles”.

What starts out as Adbembi reproducing a stereotypical immigrant accommodation narrative ends as an uncompromising verbalisation of what Cohen

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<sup>535</sup> Aristide Zolberg uses the term “wanted but not welcome syndrome” to capture the contradictory conditions faced by immigrant labourers who may, on the host nation’s terms, be given economic citizenship but are denied any form of social and cultural citizenship (1987: 36-74).

has termed the “rationale of homely racism”, the fear that “if immigrants put down roots, if ethnic minorities make a home from home, then they are perceived to threaten the privileged link between habit and habitat upon which the myth of indigenous origins rests”.<sup>536</sup> If this link were to break down then there would be nothing to stop the slave becoming the master in the master’s own home(land), thereby destabilising the established ethnic hierarchy upon which the native population’s supposed superiority relies. Exchanges such as those described above illustrate how ethnic segregation is perpetuated by physically housing immigrants out of sight, and therefore psychologically keeping them out of mind. The attacks that mark the film’s dramatic climax can be seen as an extreme and unthinking expression of the physical reinforcement of ethnic hierarchies. The disproportionate nature of the aggression apparent not only in these attacks, but also in the natives’ response to the immigrants’ reasonable demands – wanting to legalise their situation, rent an empty flat, or be given access to the same recreational spaces – could be read as indicative of how strong and yet how vulnerable the concept of home(land) is.

### **5.3 Creating Home(place) in a Hostile Space: (Be)longings, Improvisation and Moving Images**

As discussed in the work of Doreen Massey and Nancy S. Landale, family, home and migration are inextricably linked for many across the globe.<sup>537</sup> Just one such example is how migration for economic reasons, the type on which *Flores* and *Poniente* focus, often forms part of a family strategy to maximize “resources and opportunities in the global economy”.<sup>538</sup> In such contexts, where an ever-increasing

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<sup>536</sup> Cohen (1996: 75).

<sup>537</sup> See Landale (1997: 282-283) and Massey (1990).

<sup>538</sup> Parreñas (2001: 80).

number of people are voluntarily or forcibly dislocated, the symbolic significance of home, or, to use hooks' term, "homeplace", is arguably more powerful than ever. It is no accident that fragile and transitional homeplaces, constructed by marginalised individuals and/or communities, are often violated and destroyed. Nevertheless, hooks defiantly uses homeplace to refer to a private space of renewal, where ethnic Others can strive to be subjects and restore the dignity denied to them in a public world characterised by racist oppression and domination. She acknowledges the sexism inherent in the patriarchal tradition of defining the task of creating a home environment as women's "natural role", but argues that to dismiss the private sphere on this basis is to underestimate the importance of homeplace as "a site of resistance".<sup>539</sup> Although hooks employs homeplace to discuss the legacy of African-American slavery in the United States her recognition of the radically political dimension of the act of constructing homeplace in a hostile space make it a particularly useful term when analysing representations of immigrants, such as those in *Flores* and *Poniente*, attempting to negotiate a sense of be(long)ing in Spain at the turn of the twenty-first century.

The contested nature of domestic space in *Flores*, and the improvised quality of the *cortijos* in *Poniente*, render the often imperceptible process of constructing homeplace, the weaving together of multiple personal and cultural narratives, memories and practices, more visible. As Flesler has pointed out, earlier immigration films tended to dwell on immigrants' "difficult arrival in Spain" and the popular and institutionalised racism they faced. She adds that although these aspects do not disappear completely in later films, the focus does shift towards "the depiction of

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<sup>539</sup> See hooks (1990: 41-49).

immigrants' daily life and work in Spain *as their home*".<sup>540</sup> With this in mind and attempting, like Bollain and Gutiérrez, to privilege the experiences of their immigrant characters, the following section will look at how the films represent the construction of transnational homeplaces as a process of weaving together material, emotional and cultural factors. It also considers John McLeod's observation that migrants invariably arrive with baggage, "both in the physical sense of possessions or belongings, but also with the less tangible matter of beliefs, traditions, customs, behaviours and values" in relation to *Flores* and *Poniente*.<sup>541</sup> It explores how these two films use the stories of individuals, whose geographical (dis)location requires that ties to their biological families and cultural home(land)s span the distances between two or more nation states, to examine the struggle immigrants face as they try to maintain these ties, while also seeking to establish some form of homeplace and/or family in Spain.

In *Poniente* a focus is placed on how male immigrants from North Africa attempt to construct a homeplace for themselves within an overtly hostile social environment. They are given little choice but to make their homes in the *cortijos* owned by local farmers for whom they work. Here *cortijo*, a word that would usually mean farmhouse, is somewhat euphemistically used to refer to ramshackle old shells of buildings that have been converted into basic shelters. The viewer is introduced to this world when the camera follows Saïd and his friend Ahmed inside the *cortijo* that they share with many other men, providing us with a fleeting taste of the conditions in which they live [Still 19]. The *cortijo* appears half-built at best, the walls are a mixture of bare brick and unpainted plaster, and blankets and plastic sheets serve as makeshift doors and windows. Moreover, with no internal doors and communal areas

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<sup>540</sup> Flesler (2004: 105). My italics.

<sup>541</sup> McLeod (2000: 211).

doubling as bedrooms there is little or no privacy for the men. Despite this there has been a discernible attempt to make the space homely; in one sequence diegetic ‘Arabic-style’ music plays in the background and we see the men gathered like a family around a low table where a Moroccan-style teapot and glasses are laid out. The only language spoken is Arabic and the lack of Spanish sub-titles has the effect of momentarily immersing and yet linguistically alienating the spectator. Within such spaces objects, like the teapot and glasses, take on a profound social and cultural resonance. As Lydia Gautier notes “in Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa, [drinking] tea forms part of the collective consciousness”,<sup>542</sup> and in this sequence the shared ritual represents a welcome degree of cultural continuity and familiarity in the midst of a transient space. Maintaining this custom and choosing to drink mint tea rather than switching to coffee, beer or the carbonated drinks more common in Spain, provides an everyday link to and reminder of another time and place, of homes, family and friends left behind.

Saïd and Ahmed are the only ones of this group whom the spectator sees consuming alcohol, a choice that could be read as an act of incorporation implying “a chance and a hope – of becoming more what one is, or what one would like to be”. As Claude Fischler notes “food makes the eater: it is therefore natural that the eater should try to make himself by eating”.<sup>543</sup> Saïd, who sports a baseball cap worn back to front and baggy jeans, the ubiquitous uniform of youth in the West, seems to have the same material aspirations as his Spanish counterparts; like Miguel’s son Miguelito (Rubén del Castillo) and his friends who want to start work as soon as possible to be able to earn their own money. For example, we see Saïd perusing a catalogue of

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<sup>542</sup> Gautier (2006: 60).

<sup>543</sup> Fischler (1988: 282).



domestic electrical appliances and he is determined to leave the *cortijos* and move into a flat in the village. His attitude suggests that he hopes that his consumption of and desire to possess the material comforts and trappings of the Western lifestyle, signifiers of home, will automatically qualify him for ‘membership’.

However, Saïd’s actions physically and psychologically situate him on the margins of the group of immigrants. This is illustrated during the *paella* sequence in which a series of familial images are juxtaposed with a single shot of Saïd, standing away from the main group, drinking a beer while sharing a cigarette with Ahmed. The frame is split down the middle by a wooden post, visually emphasising the social isolation of Saïd and Ahmed in the foreground to the right from the vague but convivial background image of the community embodied by the chatting adults and playing children. Saïd is therefore presented as willingly foregoing the solidarity offered by the alternative family composed of immigrants, while frustrated in his aspirations to a more conventional Spanish home. Despite his youthful energy, his ambitions make him particularly vulnerable and he is later the protagonist of one of the film’s most affecting moments. After he and Ahmed fail to gain entry to the local strip club, they drunkenly stagger back into their *cortijo* disturbing the other men sleeping several to a mattress. The final image of Saïd shows him lying on his shared mattress, his belligerent confidence stripped away. He sobs like a child, lost in a country where he wants to belong but is repeatedly rejected and reminded that his ‘home’ is elsewhere.

Adbembi, the other immigrant whose character is developed in some depth, is older and has been in Spain for four years to Saïd’s six months. When the latter makes denigratory remarks about the *cortijos*, which he describes as only fit for pigs, and by extension the immigrants who have lived in them for years, Adbembi becomes

defensive. This is not to say that Adbembi is oblivious to the undesirable nature of the immigrants' accommodation, or to the twisted logic with which Miguel tries to convince him of their good fortune. The latter insists that the immigrants should be content to have been given lodgings in the house where he was born, conveniently ignoring the fact that the rest of his life has been spent in trying to move away from his humble origins, both socially and financially. He nevertheless refuses to discuss the disadvantages of the *cortijos* with Saïd, breaking into Arabic to remind him heatedly that he has not been around long enough to pass judgement, and that many other immigrants are working to support families elsewhere. As far as the spectator understands, Adbembi is not referring to his own situation here, there is no mention in the film of his family back home. Instead, his defensive attitude is informed by the solidarity he is shown to feel with his fellow immigrants, solidarity that for him transforms the *cortijos* into a homeplace, a foundation upon which his sense of be(long)ing in Spain seems to be built.

John Urry points out that “migration disperses family members and friends across vast areas and thus the intimate networks of care, support and affection stretch over large geographical distances”.<sup>544</sup> The transnational and deterritorialised forms of kinship created by movement and migration have meant that dislocated families have increasingly had to rely on mediated forms of connection such as the telephone and photographs.<sup>545</sup> As mentioned in most of the previous chapters, photographs are a means of (re)producing and (re)affirming family narratives and often serve as powerful mediators of memories. For such reasons Susan Sontag has argued that

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<sup>544</sup> Urry (2007: 226).

<sup>545</sup> Marisa Lafuente's short film *Platicando* (2004) about migrants using one of the thousands of *locutorios* that have appeared all over Spain explores how “transnational connectivity through cheap telephone calls is at the heart of their lives” (Urry, 2007: 226).

family photographs are an indispensable item in the immigrant's suitcase because "through photographs, each family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself, a portable kit of images that bear witness to its connectedness".<sup>546</sup> In *Flores and Poniente* a variety of images are viewed and/or created by characters.

In her analysis of *Flores* Santaolalla observes that there is very little in the village of Santa Eulalia or its houses "that suggests the idea of homeliness", and that "many scenes rely on indoor claustrophobic settings to mark the characters' entrapment".<sup>547</sup> Nowhere is this more apparent than with Milady. It may be Carmelo's profession to physically build potential homes, but it soon becomes clear that she does not feel at home in Carmelo's house, where he hopes to make her into another showy, fixed feature like the expensive kitchen or the fireplace made to his design. The cherished photographs of family and friends that Milady has brought with her are presented as her only signifiers of (be)longing, indeed the spectator is alerted to that fact that she must be preparing to leave the village precisely because we see her taking the pictures down and packing them away. The act of looking at them simultaneously implies emotional contact, while reinforcing the painful physical distance from her home(land) [Still 20]. These photographs and the telephone are presented as her primary means of maintaining what has been termed a "symbolic proximity" to those she has left behind.<sup>548</sup> However, as Santaolalla points out, although objects such as photographs and vehicles alleviate the characters' spatial isolation in *Flores*, the relief they provide is only momentary.<sup>549</sup> By giving the spectator intimate access to such personal images and conversations the film

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<sup>546</sup> Sontag (1989: 8).

<sup>547</sup> Santaolalla (2004: 134 and 135).

<sup>548</sup> Morley (2000: 178).

<sup>549</sup> Santaolalla (2004: 135).

encourages the spectator to recognise the high emotional cost of migration, while also working to disrupt the generalisations and neat them/us binary consistently (re)produced in the media.

For Patricia, who has spent years being ‘out of place’, homeplace has come to be tied much more to people, “mi gente”, “mi familia”, than to place. Symptomatic of this is her description of home, “donde esté yo”, which employs the subjunctive as though anticipating the uncertainties surrounding the need for further movement. However, in contrast to Milady’s photographs, which she keeps in an easily transportable Cuban cigar box or has on improvised display around the mirror in the bedroom, Patricia has framed the portraits of the new family she and her children have formed with Damián. They hang on the wall of the marital bedroom like qualification certificates, in a (re)affirmation of their legal status [Still 21]. Moreover, the photographs of Janai (Isabel de los Santos) and Orlandito (Richard Ovalles) that Patricia was shown carrying with her in a plastic wallet during the film’s opening sequence have also been framed and positioned on top of a chest of drawers in the couple’s bedroom. The time and thought implicit in the formalised presentation and arrangement of such family images is a powerful expression of the concerted practical investment they are making in building an emotional homeplace together.

The provisional quality of Milady’s display of photographs is echoed in the snapshots she takes of herself during the course of the film to send to friends and family in Cuba, as if she were on holiday. In this way she chooses visually to construct herself as a tourist enjoying the cultural products and material accessories of successful life Spain. However, as Kim perceptively writes, this version of reality does not seem to “originate from a sense of inferiority but from the insecurity she

feels about her future in Santa Eulalia”.<sup>550</sup> Patricia also sends photographs back to her family in the Dominican Republic, but chooses framed wedding and family portraits that firmly locate her as a permanent resident within a legalised family.

In *Poniente* mechanically reproduced images are not only used as a way of visualising ‘stretched’ links in time and space between individual families, but also of illustrating modern Spain’s connectedness to its past and its present. The old super eight home movies shot in Switzerland that one of Pepe’s fellow *Gastarbeiter* left with him bear witness to a less prosperous period in Spain’s history. However, the film suggests that in this case, the links are not maintained with enough care: these are the (national) family histories and photographs that have been collectively (dis)remembered and repressed.<sup>551</sup> As Pepe says to Curro, referring to the reels, “esto ya no le interesa a nadie”. These moving images also help to forge a clear visual connection between the hardships and indignities suffered by Spain’s own economic migrants in the 1960s and 70s and the immigrants arriving in the country at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The striking similarities between these two experiences are suggested in an elliptical sequence that starts with Curro giving some of the immigrants he knows a lift back to the *cortijos*, and ends with him viewing one of the old home movies with Pepe, who was also in Switzerland as a guestworker in the 1960s. When Saïd and Ahmed leave Curro’s car, the camera follows them into their improvised accommodation. However, when Curro drops off Adbembi, although he stares out of the car after his friend, an eyeline match does not transport the viewer to another *cortijo*, as anticipated in the previous scene, but cuts instead to the grainy

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<sup>550</sup> Kim (2005: 181).

<sup>551</sup> Filmic representations of this phenomenon tended to take the form of light-hearted comedies such as *Vente a Alemania, Pepe* (Pedro Lazaga, 1971). It was not until *Poniente*, the documentary *El tren de la memoria* (Marta Arribas and Ana Pérez, 2003) and *Un franco, 14 pesetas* (Carlos Iglesias, 2006) were released that a film took a more serious look at this issue, focusing on the tendency to suppress individual and collective memories of this difficult time.

personal images of the home movie. A long shot reveals the white washed walls of Pepe's humble dwelling fulfilling the function of a screen, a powerful expression of Spain's painful past being quite literally projected onto the present.

The home movie comprises a series of brief vignettes that present the spectator with a haunting visual sketch of the Spanish emigrant experience: a mass of disorientated gaunt figures laden with luggage in a railway station; a tiny dark bedroom dominated by towers of suitcases, markers "of concrete material belongings and of travel and movement away from the naturalised anchoring";<sup>552</sup> an emaciated man huddled under blankets; and adults and children working stamping metal in their cramped living area, a television glowing in the corner of the room the only sign of their improving financial situation, the only reason for tolerating such an environment. These are all images that have present-day counterparts in *Poniente*, whether in the form of television reports about refugees fleeing an unspecified war torn country, shots documenting the *cortijos* or visual evidence of the tough working conditions under plastic in Almería's greenhouses. The impact of the sequence is intensified through editing as successive cuts work to build emotional alignment by shifting from shots where the spectator shares Pepe and Curro's points of view to reaction shots. The latter capture Pepe's silent tears, a fleeting display of emotion that serves as a compelling recognition of what, for many Spaniards, was a difficult period.

The sequence is accompanied by the haunting non-diegetic music of *Poniente*'s signature theme 'Viento del poniente' performed as a *martinete*, a traditional flamenco style belonging to the *cante jondo* category. Although identified and promoted under Franco as the musical form that typified Spanishness, flamenco's origins, like those of Spain itself, are a blend of Iberian, North African, Sephardic, and

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<sup>552</sup> Rogoff (2000: 36-37).

Romany elements amongst others.<sup>553</sup> This musical accompaniment can be understood, then, as an aural reminder of the long history of these cultural connections. These shared roots are also emphasised by the *cante jondo* intonation of the song performed by one of the North African female immigrants in a later scene. Implicit in the visual and aural aspects of these sequences is the film's argument that, even if some Spaniards may not want to recognise it, many of those they perceive to be Other form an integral part of the cultural and historical landscape of their nation.

Hall asserts that immigrants are usually left little choice but “to inhabit at least two identities, to speak two cultural languages, to translate and negotiate between them”.<sup>554</sup> In *Flores* it is the younger generation of immigrants, embodied by Patricia's daughter Janai, who demonstrate a greater agility when it comes to negotiating between two cultural identities.<sup>555</sup> Patricia remains silent when Janai asks for some of the potatoes Gregoria has prepared; although her facial expression seems to suggest that she experiences her daughter's choice as a form of betrayal. Yet Janai does not reject the food from her home country in favour of that from Spain, but significantly is shown wanting to mix the two. She is also presented as a mobile character who, often at the beginning or end of sequences, moves with ease between public and private spaces. Through this role as a physical and visual intermediary the film seems to echo her status as neither first nor second-generation immigrant in the strict sense. She was not born in Spain, but she will spend her most of formative years there. She is young enough to adapt quickly and more completely than her mother, and yet old enough to preserve conscious memories of her original home(land). It is through such

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<sup>553</sup> See Leblon (2003: 47-83) and Biddle and Knights (2007: 209-210).

<sup>554</sup> Hall (1992: 310).

<sup>555</sup> The ability of first generation migrant children to negotiate, combine and move between their original culture and another with greater ease than their parents is a theme that also runs through Taberna's documentary *Extranjeras*.

touches Bollaín seems to locate hope for dialogue and a negotiated multicultural future in the figure of a young, mobile, female immigrant.

Janai is also often a witness to Patricia and Gregoria's fraught exchanges, enabling Bollaín to raise issues about cultural differences and socialisation, and the confusion and/or resentment that may grow in the children of first-generation immigrants who have to grow up in an environment where the friction between the native culture and that of their parents' homeland is constantly present.<sup>556</sup> Yet Janai's character is barely developed and she hardly utters a word. Indeed, it could be argued that she and her brother fit David MacDougall's category of filmic children who "act as surrogates for the adult viewer and receptacles for their feelings", their silence allowing us "to imagine the impressions and emotions that pass through them, as well as their moral sadness at the sight of human folly".<sup>557</sup> This is most evident in the previously discussed sequence in which Gregoria voices her displeasure at the *dominicanas'* visit and issues an ultimatum to Patricia just as Janai's silent presence becomes apparent in the kitchen doorway. Punctuating such tense moments with the physical and emotional point of view of a child, coded as the innocent victim of the situation, serves to jolt the spectator's moral conscience. Janai's presence frames and accentuates Gregoria's folly, juxtaposing the old woman's selfish petulance and fear of losing her family as she knows it with Patricia's suffering, patience and hard work.

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<sup>556</sup> The segments of *Extranjeras* that focus on a Polish mother and daughter Anna and Kamila are another particularly powerful example of this kind of friction.

<sup>557</sup> MacDougall (2006: 70-71).



#### 5.4 Utopian Solutions: Family and Friendship as models of Negotiation and Cohabitation

Giving *Bwana*, Saura's *Taxi* (1996), Vilar's *Illegal* and *Poniente* as examples, Ballesteros maintains that in the 1990s and 2000s immigration films reintroduced family as "an emblematic microcosm" that embodies the Nation's resistance, both aggressive and passive, to 'Otherness'. She adds that in *Flores* Bollaín "fictionalizes an emergency solution" to the problem of rural depopulation by presenting the family as the potential site of "interracial negotiation" and "hope for a multi-ethnic and tolerant society".<sup>558</sup> However, working within the frameworks of feminist and postcolonial studies, Ballesteros and other scholars have also criticised Bollaín's reliance on the family, claiming that she runs the risk of reproducing the potentially oppressive and unequal power relations it has traditionally embodied.<sup>559</sup> For example, Kim, in her stimulating analysis of the function of family photography in *Flores*, contends that family is represented as a "controlling device in the creation of a relationship with immigrants, which leads to an envisioning of a multicultural society, founded on the sharing of a sense of belonging rather than on a critical rethinking of national culture, race, and ethnicity".<sup>560</sup> This section argues that, although it is vital to recognise the film's limitations so ably expressed by Kim, such analyses nevertheless suppress the significance of the critical (re)thinking and (re)imagining of family undertaken in *Flores*, and to a lesser degree, in *Poniente*.

It has been argued that in *Flores* the immigrant woman is presented as the saviour of a traditional way of life, an arrangement that simply displaces the

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<sup>558</sup> Ballesteros (2005: 7).

<sup>559</sup> See Ballesteros (2005), Camí-Vela (2001), Kim (2005: 173-189) and Martín Márquez (2002).

<sup>560</sup> Kim (2005: 173).

exploitation of Spanish women with that of disadvantaged Others.<sup>561</sup> Certainly the film seems to promote family as a viable means of successful integration for immigrants, but it does not imply that the Other who wishes to be accepted must cast themselves in the role of the compliant “perfecta casada” discussed in the introduction. Indeed, the film denies the creation of a family following the traditional patriarchal model that would have been formed by Carmelo and Milady had she capitulated to his chauvinistic expectations. Moreover, as discussed above it is Milady who actively thwarts these expectations.

In Patricia’s case, although she is brought to Santa Eulalia by the men of the village as part of the *caravana de mujeres*, in a revision of the quest model, it is she who seeks out a husband prepared to accept her terms. Once they are married Patricia continues to be presented as the more active partner in the relationship with Damián, as, for example, in the bedroom scenes. Although Patricia and Damián’s relationship is initially based on necessity, as the narrative develops, it grows to be characterised by mutual respect, willing compromise and reciprocity. Their slow-burning romance enables Bollaín to explore how The Traditional Family is being irrevocably altered and helps position the spectator to welcome this.

Drawing on Homi Bhabha’s analysis of policies of multiculturalism, Kim criticises the utopian ending for Patricia and Damián encapsulated by the family photograph [Still 22] taken after Janai’s First Communion as “a public fantasy of agreement that results in a containment of ideological discussion”.<sup>562</sup> She also points out that while idealised images of family, such as Patricia and Damian’s portrait photographs, are “effective tools to communicate and promote the idea of

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<sup>561</sup> Martín Márquez (2002: 268-269).

<sup>562</sup> Kim (2005: 186).

multiculturalism [...] [they] often fall short of critically assessing the conflicts and negotiations that family members undergo”.<sup>563</sup> Similarly, in her discussion of *Flores*, María Camí-Vela argues that “la construcción de la nueva nación incluye al inmigrante, pero no se altera la construcción familiar tradicional”.<sup>564</sup>

However, both analyses underplay the important heterogeneity that lies behind this image. The photograph celebrates a vision of family that goes beyond the traditional nuclear, biological family by including adoptive kin and friends; not only is the familial group in the photograph ethnically diverse but it is also presented as a “family of choice”. Moreover, it is only with the reconciliation between Patricia and Damián after she confesses her bigamy to him that we come to see their family romance as a true success story with genuine potential for a happy ending. Her revelation exposes their marriage as null and void in the eyes of both the law and the church. However, it is only when the validity of the marriage certificate is taken away that their union becomes truly believable; they stay together, not because of any official sanction, but because they have worked hard to build a relationship that is mutually satisfying. Contrary to Kim’s insinuations, therefore, the conventions of family photography that produce happy images of belonging do not render Patricia’s trials and suffering invisible. Indeed, the spectator’s knowledge of Patricia’s emotional journey means that the evocation of these conventions in the penultimate sequence of the film could in fact be read as gently ironic. The creation and display of portraits of the new family formed by Patricia and Damián, rather than (re)producing The Traditional Family, articulate a diversification and reinvention of the (national) family.

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<sup>563</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>564</sup> Camí-Vela (2000: 188).

Whereas Bollaín combines romance and family drama in *Flores* to advance an anti-racist agenda of multicultural harmony as a commonsense solution, Gutiérrez's mixes romance and family drama with the biracial buddy formula in *Poniente*. A staple Hollywood narrative strategy, already employed in *En la puta calle*, *El sudor de los ruseñores* and *El traje* (Alberto Rodríguez, 2002) the buddy formula tends, as David J. Leonard has observed, to be employed to tell "narratives of interracial cooperation" that ultimately result in "personal and communal growth".<sup>565</sup> Gutiérrez claims that her film reflects a "mundo de migraciones, porque todos somos producto de ellas",<sup>566</sup> and it is through the friendship between Curro and Adbembi that she is able to stress most effectively the close cultural and historical links connecting Spain and its immigrant community, as discussed above.

The potential for solidarity inherent in these links is made explicit and visually celebrated during the sequence in which Curro takes Lucía and her daughter Clara to eat *paella* "con unos amigos" (Adbembi and many of the other immigrants) at one of the *cortijos*. This sequence constitutes an uplifting moment of togetherness in a film in which tension and hostility predominate. An ethnically diverse group is shown preparing and eating food together, and later making music, chatting and dancing around a bonfire that functions here like a primordial family hearth. Clara is shown cuddled happily under blankets in the firelight next to Curro, who protectively arranges the covers over her in a fatherly manner. Adbembi sits with him and they are presented as witnesses, comfortable in each others' company, as they comment on the scene:

Adbembi:    Hacía años que no me sentía así.

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<sup>565</sup> Leonard (2006: 191). See also the discussion of these films in Santaolalla (2005).

<sup>566</sup> Santaolalla (2006) [accessed 29.5.08], quoting Gutiérrez.

Curro: ¿Y cómo te sientes?

Adbembi: Como un hombre normal celebrando una fiesta con su familia.

In this sequence, the *cortijo* is transformed into an almost magical space where the cohabitation of peoples and cultures can be presented as one big, happy family [Still 23]. The marginal becomes a locus where the celebration of ethnic diversity can be imagined. The whole sequence is picturesque in the extreme, to such an extent that its idealisation of the immigrants' substandard living conditions ceases to be problematic. However, the seemingly self-conscious clichés of different coloured children happily playing and the dancing around the fire create an overtly utopian vision that, like that of the different coloured children throwing snowballs and unwrapping Christmas presents together in *Flores*, is excessive in its harmony. In *Poniente* this vision serves to accentuate the tragedy of what follows.

Curro and Adbembi's relationship is central to this vision, but remains believable throughout the film. It is presented as based on their shared sense of displacement and self-irony. At regular intervals, Curro refers to his dream of opening a *chiringuito* with Adbembi, whom he describes as his only friend. This small-scale shared project is however shown to be an impossible dream, and a final, visual reference to it is used to heighten the impact of the film's conclusion. Badly beaten by the locals after he has tried to defend the immigrants by accusing Miguel of being responsible for the fire in Lucía's greenhouses, Curro is left by the *chiringuito*. She finds him the next morning, and cradling his broken body, looks out to sea. Shown in slow motion, a group of immigrants makes its way along the beach laden with baggage, seemingly leaving town. Adbembi is the last in this beleaguered procession, and he stops for a final look in-land, back toward the *chiringuito*. Curro may be left in the arms of a woman proclaiming her love for him, but the film's final image is not of

this romance. Instead, *Poniente* closes with a reference to the two men's friendship and their shattered dream of interracial co-operation.

### 5.5 Conclusion

Graham and Antonio Sánchez note that, rather than “recognising a commonality and attempting to integrate the experience of the marginalized into its own self-proclaimedly pluralistic culture”, Spain has firmly adopted the defensive, exclusionary stance of a ‘First World’ European nation.<sup>567</sup> Commenting on some of the many inconsistencies that this posture generates, Brindusa Maria Ciufudean makes the following incisive remarks:

Una cosa es muy curiosa, muchos piensan que la inmigración es una ‘invasión’. Si eso fuera así, ¿cómo podemos luego dejar a los que nos ‘invaden’ que cuiden a solas de nuestros ancianos, nuestros niños o también hacernos la comida e incluso de cuidar de nuestros espacios más privados?<sup>568</sup>

As explored in the first two sections it is precisely these kinds of contradictions that spectators are confronted with in *Flores de otro mundo* and *Poniente*.

In both films, the threat the natives perceive the Other as posing to their homes and livelihoods is presented as a lie or an excuse, and a poor one at that, to justify racially motivated discrimination and violence. Although Gregoria never resorts to physical aggression in *Flores*, she mounts a relentless campaign of emotional and psychological violence against Patricia, in which preserving the domestic status quo is both her goal and a weapon with which she unsuccessfully tries to alienate her new daughter-in-law. As Curro and the viewer are aware in *Poniente*, the immigrants are

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<sup>567</sup> Graham and Sánchez (1995: 415).

<sup>568</sup> Ciufudean (2007) [accessed 2.2.08].

being used as a scapegoat by Miguel and the other natives, who are intent on making it clear “quien manda aquí” in the words of racist farmer Joaquín (Ricardo Arroyo). Cohen notes that the function of the scapegoat “is to unfold a narrative that justifies our own ‘right of return’ to the primordial home in order to expel ‘unwanted intruders’ and make the world safe for our own kind.”<sup>569</sup> However, *Flores* and *Poniente* reveal the hypocrisy and moral corruption of such narratives. Through their representations of domestic space they suggest not only that it is selfish ignorance that sustains such racist hypocrisy, but also that the ‘intruder’ or ‘enemy’ most often comes from within. In this way difference is, to some extent, domesticated as the films encourage the spectator to see, in Freudian terms, the *heimlich* within that which is unfamiliar and therefore frightening, while at the same time being made to consider the *unheimlich* within their own societies and within themselves.<sup>570</sup>

In an interview about *Poniente*, Gutiérrez gives an explanation of racism that is expressed in terms of material possessions and greed: “El miedo [al Otro] se produce porque la tarta hay que repartirla entre más, y ha prendido un sentimiento de posesión que nos lleva a proteger el trozo que se supone nos corresponde”.<sup>571</sup> Her film confronts the spectator with questions as to the rights and motivations of the native community in such a way as to present this condemnation of racism on humanitarian grounds as simple common sense. Both Bollaín and Gutiérrez use familial relations and domestic space to frame and personalise dramas of displacement of the type that are usually played out anonymously in the press. Counterbalancing the impersonal statistics and reporting of the national media, the films employ the stories of individuals and mobilise the melodramatic mode as a means of kindling the (white,

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<sup>569</sup> Cohen (2002: 195).

<sup>570</sup> See Santaolalla (2004) for a thought-provoking discussion of the *heimlich* and *unheimlich* in *Flores*.

<sup>571</sup> Gutiérrez (2002) [accessed 7.1.05].

middle-class, Spanish) spectator's interest in peoples, cultures and experiences that may otherwise seem alien and threatening.

Thus, a strong didactic vein runs through *Flores* and *Poniente*, and as is evident from the films themselves and interviews they have given, both Bollaín and Gutiérrez are clearly intent on playing a part in a process of conscious-raising that is usually seen as the preserve of politicians or social activists. Nevertheless, the films seem more concerned with raising questions than presenting answers; as Bollaín has stated, “el cine es un medio fabuloso para denunciar, y si no para denunciar, por los menos para hacer reflexionar”.<sup>572</sup> The liberal, universalist discourse of human rights and integration that *Poniente* and *Flores* promote has been criticised for the way in which it potentially minimises cultural difference and specificities. Evidently there are inherent difficulties and limitations for directors like Bollaín and Gutiérrez coming from a position of relative racial privilege but wanting to speak of, through and for some of Spain's newest residents. However, on balance, their carefully researched, sensitive and sympathetic treatment of some of the problems faced by migrants have, as Santaolalla observes, proved useful “como herramienta de concienciación y cambio social”.<sup>573</sup>

The structures of sympathy the films establish encourage the spectator to (re)view their own potential racist prejudices and also the entrenched racism of society and the establishment. Looking to Brooks, it might be argued that the melodramatic sensibility at work in the meticulously crafted emotional journeys of the films' protagonists functions to foster in us a greater clarity about “the kinds of

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<sup>572</sup> Camí-Vela (2000: 179).

<sup>573</sup> See Santaolalla (2006) [accessed 29.5.08]. Examples of the films being put to anti-racist educational uses include Criado (2009) [accessed 10.7.09], Eudalter (no date1) [accessed 10.7.09] and Cineforum [accessed 10.7.09].



problems we have to deal with, and the means we have for undertaking their imaginative ‘solution’”.<sup>574</sup> In their recognition of hidden or misunderstood virtues the films could also be said to define what Williams has termed “moral good in a world where virtue has become hard to read”.<sup>575</sup> Contrary to popular and political discourses that only tend to represent immigrants and immigration as a social problem, these texts explore how they may be (re)viewed as social solutions instead. Through the character of Gregoria in *Flores* and Miguel in *Poniente*, the films firmly espouse the message that those natives unwilling to accept the immigrant population will, sooner or later, suffer deservedly because of their hostile conduct. They propose that family will be stronger if it becomes a diverse and flexible social space. This is just one of the ways in which these films deliver powerful indictments of those unwilling to (re)imagine a more ethnically diverse model of the (national) family and share their home(land). With its happy celebrations of difference within *The Postmodern Family* *Flores* ends on a hopeful note; however, the violence and broken families of *Poniente*'s final sequences are more pessimistic about this potential to embrace change on a national and familial level.

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<sup>574</sup> Brooks (1995: 206).

<sup>575</sup> Williams (1998: 54).

## CONCLUSION

### POSTMODERN FAMILY MELODRAMAS

As discussed in each chapter the films that form the focus of this thesis can be read as working to make the spectator question the hegemony of The Traditional Family and/or its contemporary incarnation, The Neoconservative Family. The self-conscious but uncannily ‘true-to-life’ fictional family in *Familia* stresses the assumed and performative character of The Traditional Family, while humour is used to reaffirm yet also destabilise its inevitability. By centring its narrative on a mother and daughter, and how their relationship is haunted by the figure of the patriarch, *Solas* presents The Traditional Family as a curse suffered and endured at great personal cost by generations of women. *Te doy mis ojos* reminds the spectator that domestic violence is not the preserve of older generations or the lower classes, and that for some The Neoconservative Family can be hell on earth. In *Cachorro* the persistent belief that a child should only be brought up in the kind of heterosexual environment associated with The Traditional Family is presented as shortsighted and even detrimental to the child’s emotional wellbeing. *Flores de otro mundo* challenges the hegemonic whiteness of The Traditional Family in Spain, while *Poniente* highlights the hypocrisy and hidden costs of this middle-class ideal.

The films’ progressive gender politics are also pivotal to their criticisms of The Traditional/Neoconservative Family. They scrutinise the underlying inequalities of gendered social structures and power dynamics, and place a particular emphasis on interrogating masculine and feminine roles in familial contexts. *Familia*, *Solas*, *Te doy*, *Flores* and *Poniente* all feature at least one female protagonist who suffers

because of the established gender order of The Traditional Family. However, rather than being presented as passive victims many of these protagonists, together with a number of secondary female characters, are shown actively resisting patriarchal oppression. Characters including María in *Solas*, Pilar, Ana and Rosa in *Te doy*, Patricia and Milady in *Flores*, and Lucía in *Poniente* are presented as being in a process of trying to define their own roles that ultimately takes them outside or frees them from the conventions of The Traditional Family. However, the critical focus does not fall on women's roles alone as, to varying degrees, all of the films make a concerted effort to examine men's family roles and responsibilities. The most salient example of this gender conscious filmmaking can be found in *Te doy*, in the thorough development of Antonio's character, the inclusion of his experiences at an all-male therapy group and the inclusion of 'new man' John as a utopian model of progressive masculinity.

Furthermore, in their exploration of the inequalities and domination embodied by The Traditional/Neoconservative Family several of the films stress their liberal position by partnering their consideration of gender issues alongside those of class, sexual orientation and race. In *Solas* gender and class politics are placed side by side, an aspect that has been suppressed in (white, middle-class) feminist readings of the film's representations of mothering. It is the politics of sexuality that comes to the fore in *Cachorro*, but attention is also paid to gender through the engagement with questions of adult role models and child socialisation. A connection is established between gender and racial politics in *Flores* and *Poniente*, especially in the former's sensitive treatment of the potential double oppression of immigrant women and the parallels the latter draws between the sexism faced by Lucía and the racist discrimination experienced by La Isla's immigrant population.

The films eschew the seemingly all-pervasive notion that, at the turn of the twenty-first century, The Traditional Family is continually under attack from external pressures and internal factors such as women's employment outside the home, increased sexual freedoms and the rise of individualism. They challenge this notion by implying that these factors only pose a threat because of the enduring inequalities that structure The Traditional Family and the determination of those on the moral Right to maintain its hegemonic status. Indeed, the films present breakdown and crisis as inevitable features of The Traditional Family because of its stifling inability to adapt to social developments and postmodern notions of fluid identities. For example, in *Te doy* it is not Pilar's incorporation into the labour market but rather Antonio's violent resistance to this change that is presented as responsible for breaking their family apart. In addition the films also contain characters and storylines that demonstrate how such changes do not have to be incompatible with the familial. *Cachorro* explores how Pedro's choice to lead a promiscuous sex life does not prevent him from maintaining a stable relationship and a nurturing home environment for his nephew.

Although on the one hand these films question the privileged position afforded to The Traditional/Neoconservative Family, on the other they do not dismiss the continuing relevance of the familial. This focus on the familial has been read by some commentators as indicative of a regressive affirmation of conservative social structures. However, such interpretations overlook the critique of The Traditional/Neoconservative Family discussed above. They also fail to appreciate how and to what extent the alternative or (re)negotiated family structures, roles and values that the films' narrative resolutions promote differ from traditional family models. Moreover, I propose that the persistence of the familial in these recent Spanish films tells us as much if not more about the present and the future than it does about the

past. It would seem to point to an impetus to use film as a cultural site of struggle where developing and innovative family meanings and practices can be imaginatively (re)negotiated and (re)presented. If under Franco the personal, in the form of The Family, was ideologically colonised from above, in post-Franco, post-transition Spain the personal, as though echoing the feminist slogan, has become political from below.

Basing this thesis on the close textual analysis of a small number of films has enabled me to explore in depth the complex relationships between family ideologies, film form, and modes of representation and address. However, the choices made, in terms of selecting overtly socially engaged films to form the focus of each chapter and in opting to concentrate only on film, evidently leave room for further research. One fertile way of expanding this current study might include analysing those films more firmly positioned as mainstream entertainment, documentaries or experimental art cinema to see whether or not they undertake similar criticisms of The Traditional Family and how they (re)present Postmodern Family forms, values and practices. Films that raise different formal questions from those examined here, and could constitute part of an interesting expansion, might include *El milagro de P. Tinto* (Javier Fesser, 1998), *En construcción* (Guerín, 2001), *Extranjeras* (Taberna, 2003), *De nens* (Jordà, 2003), *Aguaviva* (Ariadna Pujol, 2005), *Semen, una historia de amor* (Fejerman and París, 2005), *La soledad* (Jaime Rosales, 2007) and *Bajo las estrellas* (Félix Viscarret, 2007).

This thesis has touched, albeit very briefly, on how criticisms and celebrations of dominant and emerging family ideologies have been inscribed not just in films but in other interlocking cultural forms and texts including television programming, family photography, opinion polls, laws, policy documents, public demonstrations and the webpages of a number of organisations. By moving more fully into the realm

of media and cultural studies future research could rewardingly undertake more detailed readings of these and other cultural texts that engage with, and/or instigate new debates about family. This widening of the field might include the popular press in general, and lifestyle magazines and *la prensa rosa* in particular, advertising in all its possible guises, school textbooks, radio broadcasting and phone-ins, and the constantly developing forms of online communication including chatrooms, blogs and social networking sites. Analysing such texts in greater detail would help to formulate a fuller picture of the shifts away from The Traditional Family being articulated within the cultural imaginary, and the new meanings of family circulating and gaining authority within the public consciousness.

However, what remains the focus here is the specific ways in which *Solas*, *Te doy*, *Cachorro*, *Flores* and *Poniente* (re)present family. As regards their imaginative function they can be understood not only as working critically to deconstruct the hegemony of The Traditional/Neoconservative Family, but also as taking on a constructive role in the articulation, circulation and naturalisation of The Postmodern Family in Spain's cultural and public imagination. The films work in dialogue with The Traditional/Neoconservative Family by recognising the merit of certain values and practices. However, in a period characterised by strengthening waves of moral panic over the alleged loss of values associated with decline of The Traditional Family they also hold it up as an example of how The Postmodern Family needs to be different and to be able to embrace difference. Of greatest interest here, however, are the forms, functions and values that the films associate with The Postmodern Family and the representational strategies used to position the spectator in relation to this emerging ideology.

Moving away from the nuclear family that convention dictates as ideally consisting of a (heterosexual) mother and father and at least 2.4 (biological) children, these films (re)imagine family forms in terms of mutually beneficial living arrangements and support networks that come into being through choice. Alternative emotional and practical bonds are presented as just as capable, if not in some cases as more capable, of successfully fulfilling the nurturing functions traditionally deemed to be the preserve of blood and/or marriage ties. María's arrangement with her neighbour Don Emilio brings her the assistance and safe environment she never experienced in her biological family; Pilar's friends Lola and Rosa give her the moral support and the confidence she needs to break free from her abusive husband; the *mafia osa*, Pedro's family of choice, are the people he can rely upon when things go wrong; the emotional strength of Damián and Patricia's relationship is truly confirmed only after their legally binding marriage is revealed as a sham; while Lucía, foresaken by her father and husband and hounded by her cousin, forms a reciprocated practical and emotional bond with fellow single-mother Perla (Mariola Fuentes). The values that the films attach to The Postmodern Family are much the same as those connected with The Traditional/Neoconservative Family: they include solidarity, stability, reciprocated love, companionship, a sense of community, and emotional, psychological and practical support. The great difference lies in the emphasis on 'doing' rather than simply 'having' family, on subjective solutions rather an objective institution. 'Doing' family in these films is characterised by choice, self-invention and compromise, while the division of responsibilities and labour is presented as open to (re)negotiation rather dictated by adherence to gendered conventions.

Just as The Traditional Family has been naturalised and legitimised through films amongst other cultural texts, so *Solas*, *Te doy*, *Cachorro*, *Flores* and *Poniente*

could be read as positioning the spectator to recognise, evaluate and validate the emerging ideology of The Postmodern Family. They could be understood as what Weeks has termed “necessary fictions”, those stories told to us and by us that provide a means of navigating everyday life in a world that is constantly changing.<sup>576</sup> Through their affective narrative strategies these films establish structures of sympathy that work to engage the spectator imaginatively, moulding their horizons of expectation and cuing them to adopt pro attitudes towards certain characters and certain outcomes. These, in turn, could be read as encouraging emotional, intellectual and moral alignment with the notion of The Postmodern Family. In order to do this, the films draw on multiple expressive modes that best advance what the directors present as their liberal/progressive agendas. Yet, although they employ multiple representational strategies, that which is most pervasive (and persuasive) is the melodramatic mode or sensibility. On this basis I propose that this group of films could usefully be understood as a series or cycle of Postmodern Family melodramas.

This cycle of films could be seen as heir to Bardem’s subversive reinscription of melodrama, Berlanga and Ferreri’s socially critical black comedies, Eloy de la Iglesia’s unabashedly political melodramas of the late seventies and early eighties, and even to Almodóvar’s flamboyant (re)imaginings of family during the transition. These are examples of a tendency in Spanish cinema, in part brought about by censorship, of using modes of representation often associated with entertainment, escapism and wish-fulfilment to comment on or challenge the status quo. However, as much as these melodramas could be seen to connect with the past they are also very much a product of their own moment in history. They forge what seems to be a

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<sup>576</sup> Weeks (2007: 84).



necessary space in Spanish film culture, tuned in to contemporary public opinion and social issues.

The melodramatic sensibility at work in these films is far removed from the grand theatrical gestures, sensationalism and out-and-out villains traditionally associated with melodrama. Instead, there is a high degree of surface realism, a predominance of little-known actors and naturalistic acting with only fleeting moments of more stylised performance. Plots remain within the realm of the believable, with unexpected twists and turns kept to a minimum. Linear narratives follow the everyday lives and emotional journeys of central characters with well-developed character psychologies. Subtle uses of melodramatic devices such as excess emotions siphoned off into the *mise-en-scène* and texts of muteness stress the underlying inequalities of The Traditional/Neoconservative Family. This affective mode of address is given greater force by the well-researched-socially-committed-director-writer personas that some of these directors (Bollaín, Gutiérrez and León de Aranoa in particular) have created for themselves, through media appearances and public profiling.

Crucially, these Postmodern Family melodramas do not have definitive conclusions. They present The Postmodern Family as a viable and preferable alternative to The Traditional/Neoconservative Family, and the desirable and desired ‘answer’ to the characters’ problems. In this way the films contribute to the process of building a new perfect family myth around The Postmodern Family. However, although there is utopian resolution in this regard, it is not, significantly, accompanied by a sense of closure as the future is left open. In *Solas*, *Te doy*, *Cachorro* and *Flores* the ‘happy’ endings are perhaps better read as utopian new beginnings for the protagonist and The Postmodern Family. As Vicinus has argued, whatever outward

form melodrama may take, it serves as “a cultural touchstone for large sections of society” who may feel in awe of, or unclear about the advantages of “the new society being built around them”.<sup>577</sup> In a society where social change is perceived to be happening at a rapid and confusing pace, The Postmodern Family is presented in these films not as a refuge from change but as a fluid and continually evolving part of it.

Nevertheless, as Chambers has pointed out, it is necessary to be wary of accepting new perfect family myths, of replacing the conformism associated with the Traditional Family with a new set of norms associated with the Postmodern Family.<sup>578</sup> It is here that the interaction or interdependence of surface realism and the melodramatic is particularly effective in this cycle of films; none of the Postmodern Families created are held up as universally representative or aspirational in a general sense. Instead, they feature rounded characters dealing with complex situations that point, not to the simple conflicts between good and evil that characterised earlier melodramas, but to creating personal solutions to an ambivalent and demanding social milieu. In this respect the intertwining of realistic and melodramatic elements in these films is central to ensuring that any ensuing political/public debates are relevant to contemporary society. The filmmakers in question demonstrate a specific socially committed intent beyond any desire for profit or fame; they have something they want to say about their society rather than just wanting to entertain. Nevertheless, they all seem to recognise and mobilise the power of popular modes of representation, the comic, the romantic and the melodramatic, more often associated with cinema as entertainment, to get their messages across. Even though the popular or melodramatic elements in films may not themselves be political they can, as O’Shaughnessy has

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<sup>577</sup> Vicinus (1981: 128).

<sup>578</sup> Chambers (2001: 171-172).

argued, “drive us back towards politics”.<sup>579</sup> Indeed, rather than act as opium for the unthinking masses they provoke and promote dialogue about the inequalities that continue to underlie social structures.

In an era of falling numbers at the cinema and relatively scarce subsidies for all but new filmmakers, directors may be restrained by audience tastes and market forces but not necessarily by the dominant ideological stance of the State. However, far from being slaves to conventions, *cine social* films, like much contemporary cinema but also echoing wider dramatic traditions in Spain, deftly combine comic, tragic and, in particular, melodramatic sensibilities, sometimes all within the same scene. Yet in the case of *cine social* the blending of a range of cinematic sensibilities together with social issue subject matter enables the director to make filmic statements that challenge established social structures, institutions, norms and attitudes and encourage the spectator to form opinions rather than just passively viewing/participating. This hybrid mode of storytelling seems to be a personal choice made by the filmmakers, predominantly concerned with presenting audiences with a compelling film. However, in some instances, it seems clear that this choice must also have been influenced by the exigencies of trying to achieve distribution in a competitive market dominated by genre blockbusters. Consequently it could be argued that *cine social* does not work outside or against mainstream production in Spain but rather alongside it. Filmmakers may employ melodramatic or comic modes of representation, or familiar generic elements deemed by some to be conservative, yet at the same time the broad approachability that this affords perhaps enables them to take their film’s progressive politics and postmodern family ‘message’ to more people.

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<sup>579</sup> O’Shaughnessy (2003: 200).

The films' critical success in the form of a veritable deluge of national awards and favourable reviews could be understood as part of a tradition of institutionally privileging cinema with a social conscience, which could be seen as reaching back to García Escudero's notion of *cine social* as the true and desirable Spanish cinema. However, this alone does not explain why these films were so popular with the general public in Spain at a time when there were a large range of (arguably) much more entertaining films on offer. Detailed studies on audiences, their motivations for going to see these films and their reception of them would be required to attempt a comprehensive answer to why this was the case. However, one possible answer is that they tapped into what John Cawelti has termed a culture's current "imaginative needs".<sup>580</sup> Consequently their success may be due to the ways they fill a necessary space in the national imaginary, perhaps catering for large sectors of the audience not necessarily served by either the populist films or highbrow art cinema. Or it may be that, taking the place once occupied by catechesis, they establish a progressive moral legibility in a post-sacred, post-Franco Spain. They form part of what could be seen as an emerging hegemonic liberal imaginary that anticipates the neo-socialist era of Zapatero, with its firmly secular stance, new politics of integration and drive towards the recuperation of historical memory.

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<sup>580</sup> Cawelti (1976: 260).



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## PRIMARY FILMOGRAPHY

The information given here is predominantly taken from the MCU database, with additional details from the IMDb. The year given for each film corresponds to that stated for the film's authorization date on the MCU. Likewise box office takings and spectators figures are taken from the MCU database but may not, as discussed, accurately reflect the films' full distribution. The lists of awards and film festival participation are not exhaustive but rather intended to be indicative of the success and international reach of the films.

### ***CACHORRO* (2004)**

**Director:** Miguel Albaladejo

**Script:** Miguel Albaladejo and Salvador García Ruiz

**Producer:** José L. García Arrojo and Juan Alexander

**Director of Photography:** Alfonso Sanz

**Editing:** Pablo Blanco

**Music:** Lucio Godoy

**Cast:** José Luis García Pérez (Pedro), David Castillo (Bernardo), Arno Chevrier (Manuel), Elvira Lindo (Violeta), Mario Arias (Javi), Diana Cerezo (Lola), Josele Román (Gloria), Empar Ferrer (Doña Teresa), Félix Álvarez (Dani)

**Premiere:** 8th February 2004, Berlinale, Germany

**Release Date in Spain:** 27th February 2004

**Box Office Takings:** €350.916,48

**Spectators:** 76.432

**DVD:** Manga Films B-26195-2004

Competition/Film Festival and Year	Award Won	Recipient
Czech Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Czech Republic, 2005	Best Feature Film	<i>Cachorro</i>
Dallas OUT TAKES, USA, 2004	Best Feature	<i>Cachorro</i>
Montréal World Film Festival, Canada, 2004	Best Film from Europe	<i>Cachorro</i>
Toulouse Cinespaña Film Festival, France, 2004	Best Film	<i>Cachorro</i>

Film Festival Participation	Country	Year
Berlinale	Germany	2004
Cannes Film Market	France	2004
Copenhagen International Film Festival	Denmark	2004
Chicago International Film Festival	USA	2004
Czech Gay and Lesbian Film Festival	Czech Republic	2005
Dallas OUT TAKES Lesbian and Gay Film Festival	USA	2004
Grenoble Gay and Lesbian Film Festival	France	2005
Leuven Holbei Gay and Lesbian Film Festival	Belgium	2005
Mar del Plata Film Festival	Argentina	2005
Milan International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival	Italy	2004
Montréal World Film Festival	Canada	2004
ReelPride Michigan GLBT Film Festival	USA	2005
Reykjavik Gay and Lesbian Film Festival	Iceland	2006
Sydney Film Festival	Australia	2004
Tribeca Film festival, New York	USA	2004
Toulouse Cinespaña Film Festival	France	2004
Warsaw Film Festival	Poland	2004

## **FAMILIA (1996)**

**Director:** Fernando León de Aranoa

**Script:** Fernando León de Aranoa

**Producer:** Elías Querejeta

**Director of Photography:** Alfredo F. Mayo

**Editing:** Nacho Ruíz Capillas

**Sound Editors:** Polo Aledo and Gilles Ortion

**Music:** Stéphane Grappelli, Django Reinhardt, Marc Fosset and Sonny Rollings

**Actors:** Juan Luis Galiardo (Santiago), Amparo Muñoz (Carmen), Ágata Lys (Sole), Chete Lera (Ventura), Raquel Rodrigo (Rosa), Elena Anaya (Luna), Juan Querol (Carlos), Aníbal Carbonero (Nico), Béatrice Camurat (Alicia), André Falcon (Martin)

**Premiere:** October 1996, SEMINCI Valladolid, Spain

**Release date in Spain:** 23rd January 1997

**Box Office Takings:** €545.500,56

**Spectators:** 151.333

**DVD:** Albarès Productions, Collection Latine

<b>Competition/Film Festival and Year</b>	<b>Award won</b>	<b>Recipient</b>
Angers European First Film Festival, France, 1998	Audience Award	<i>Familia</i>
Cinema Writers Circle Awards, Spain, 1998	Best New Artist	León de Aranoa
Goyas, Madrid, Spain, 1998	Best New Director	León de Aranoa
Miami Hispanic Film Festival, USA, 1997	Best Actor	Juan Luis Galiardo
	Best Film	<i>Familia</i>
Peñíscola Comedy Film Festival, Spain, 1997	Best First Work	León de Aranoa
	Best Screenplay	León de Aranoa
Santi Jordi, Catalonia, Spain, 1998	Best First Work	León de Aranoa
SEMINCI Semana Internacional de Cine de Valladolid, Spain 1996	Audience Award	León de Aranoa
	Best New Director	León de Aranoa
Turia Awards, Comunitat Valenciana, Spain, 1998	Best First Work	León de Aranoa

<b>Film Festival Participation</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Year</b>
Angers European First Film Festival	France	1998
Karlovy Vary Film Festival	Czech Republic	1997
Miami Hispanic Film Festival	USA	1997
MystFest, International Mystery Film Festival of Cattolica	Italy	1997
Peñíscola Comedy Film Festival	Spain	1997
Troia Film Festival	Portugal	1997
SEMINCI Semana Internacional de Cine de Valladolid	Spain	1996
Vancouver International Film Festival	Canada	1997

## **FLORES DE OTRO MUNDO (1999)**

**Director:** Icíar Bollaín

**Script:** Icíar Bollaín and Julio Llamazares

**Producer:** Santiago García de Leániz and Enrique González Macho

**Director of Photography:** Teo Delgado

**Editing:** Ángel Hernández Zoido

**Sound Editor:** Pelayo Gutiérrez

**Music:** Pascal Gaigne

**Actors:** José Sancho (Carmelo), Luis Tosar (Damián), Lissete Mejía (Patricia), Chete Lera (Alfonso), Marilyn Torres (Milady), Elena Irureta (Marirrosi), Amparo Valle (Gregoria), Rubén Ochandiano (Oscar), Angela Herrera (Lorna), Doris Cerdá (Daisy), Chiqui Fernández (Aurora), Carlos Kaniowsky (Felipe), Isabel de los Santos (Janay)

**Premiere:** 16th May 1999, Cannes Film Festival, France

**Release Date in Spain:** 28th May 1999

**Box Office Takings:** €1.463.888,90

**Spectators:** 372.765

**DVD:** Filmax Home Video B-34510-2000

<b>Competition/Film Festival and Year</b>	<b>Award Won</b>	<b>Recipient</b>
Bogotá Film Festival, Colombia, 1999	Silver Precolumbian Circle	Icíar Bollaín
Bordeaux International Festival of Women in Cinema, France, 1999	Audience Award	Icíar Bollaín
	Best Actress	The whole female cast
	Best Screenplay	Icíar Bollaín & Julio Llamazares
Critics Week Section, Cannes Film Festival, France, 1999	Mercedes-Benz Award	Icíar Bollaín
Nantes Spanish Film Festival, France, 2000	Jules Verne Award: Best Film	<i>Flores de otro mundo</i>

<b>Film Festival Participation</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Year</b>
Bogotá Film Festival	Colombia	1999
Bordeaux International Festival of Women in Cinema	France	1999
Cannes Film Festival	France	1999
European Union Film Festival (Itinerant)	South Africa	2001
Mar del Plata Film Festival	Argentina	1999
Montréal Film Festival	Canada	1999
Nantes Spanish Film Festival	France	2000
Singapore International Film Festival	Singapore	2000
Week of Spanish Cinema	Poland	2001

**PONIENTE (2002)****Director:** Chus Gutiérrez**Script:** Chus Gutiérrez and Icíar Bollain**Director of Photography:** Carles Gusi**Editing:** Fernando Pardo**Music:** Tao Gutiérrez and Angel Luis Samos**Producer:** Ana Huete**Actors:** Cuca Escribano (Lucía), José Coronado (Curro), Antonio Dechent (Miguel), Mariola Fuentes (Perla), Antonio de la Torre (Paquito), Farid Fatmi (Adbembi), Idilio Cardoso (Pepe), Alfonsa Rosso (Tía María), Marouane Mribti (Saïd), Ahmed (Saïd Boudhinz), Alba Fernández (Clara)**Premiere:** 1st September 2002, Venice Film Festival, Italy**Release Date in Spain:** 13th September 2002**Box Office Takings:** €470.025,23**Spectators:** 115.269**DVD:** Araba Films M-52933-2002

Competition/Film Festival and Year	Award Won	Recipient
Guadalajara Film Festival, Mexico, 2003	FIPRESCI Prize	Chus Gutiérrez
Toulouse Cinespaña Film Festival, France, 2002	Best Screenplay	Icíar Bollain & Chus Gutiérrez
	Student Jury Award: Best New Actor	Farid Fatmi
XII Turia Awards, Comunitat Valenciana, 2003	Best New Actress	Cuca Escribano
Venice Film Festival, Italy, 2002	Official Selection	<i>Poniente</i>

Film Festival Participation	Country	Year
Cinemanila Film Festival	Philippines	2003
Göteborg Film Festival	Sweden	2003
Guadalajara Film Festival	Mexico	2003
Toronto Film Festival	Canada	2002
Toulouse Cinespaña Film Festival	France	2002
Venice Film Festival	Italy	2002
Week of Spanish Cinema	Poland	2004

## **SOLAS (1999)**

**Director:** Benito Zambrano

**Script:** Benito Zambrano

**Director of Photography:** Tote Trenas

**Editing:** Fernando Pardo

**Music:** Antonio Meliveo

**Producer:** Antonio P. Pérez

**Actors:** María Galiana (Madre), Ana Fernández (María), Carlos Álvarez-Novoa (Vecino), Antonio Dechent (Médico), Paco de Osca (Padre), Juan Fernández (Juan), Miguel Alcívar (El Gordo), Talco (El perro Aquiles)

**Premiere:** 10th-21st February 1999 Berlinale, Germany

**Release Date in Spain:** 4th March 1999

**Box Office Takings:** €3.676.080,47 (9th highest earner in 2000) **Spectators:** 945.165

**DVD:** Sogedasa B-51634/99

<b>Competition/Film Festival and Year</b>	<b>Award Won</b>	<b>Recipient</b>
Angers European Film Festival, France, 2000	Best Film	<i>Solas</i>
Ariel Awards, Mexico, 2001	Best Iberoamerican Film	<i>Solas</i>
Berlinale, Germany, 1999	Panorama Audience Award	<i>Solas</i>
	Ecumenical Jury Special Prize	<i>Solas</i>
Brussels International Film Festival, Belgium, 2000	FIPRESCI Prize	Benito Zambrano
	Best European Feature	<i>Solas</i>
Cartagena Film Festival, Colombia, 2000	Cineclubs Award	<i>Solas</i>
	Critics Award	<i>Solas</i>
	Best First Work	Benito Zambrano
	Best Supporting Actress	María Galiana
Cinema Writers Circle Awards, Spain, 2000	Best Actress	María Galiana
	Best Supporting Actress	Ana Fernández
	Best Supporting Actor	Antonio Dechent
	Best Director	Benito Zambrano
	Best Film	<i>Solas</i>
	Best New Artist	Benito Zambrano
Fotogramas de Plata, Spain	Best Screenplay	Benito Zambrano
	Best Film	<i>Solas</i>
Goyas, Madrid, Spain, 2000	Best New Director	Benito Zambrano
	Best New Actor	Carlos Álvarez-Novoa
	Best New Actress	Ana Fernández
	Best Supporting Actress	María Galiana
	Best Original Screenplay	Benito Zambrano
Haifa International Film Festival, Israel, 2000	Best Film	<i>Solas</i>
Ondas Awards, Catalonia, Spain, 1999	Best Actress	María Galiana
Sant Jordi, Catalonia, 2000	Best First Work	Benito Zambrano
	Best Actress	María Galiana
Tokyo International Film Festival, Japan, 1999	Best Actor	Carlos Álvarez-Novoa
	Best Actress	María Galiana
Turia Awards, Comunitat Valenciana, Spain, 2000	Audience Award: Best Film	<i>Solas</i>
	Best Actress	Ana Fernández
	Best Spanish Film	<i>Solas</i>

**SOLAS (cont.)**

<b>Film Festival Participation</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Year</b>
Angers European Film Festival	France	2000
Berlinale	Germany	1999
Bogotá Film Festival	Colombia	1999
Brussels International Film Festival	Belgium	2000
Cartagena Film Festival	Colombia	2000
Chicago International Film Festival	USA	1999
Gothenburg Film Festival	Sweden	2000
Haifa International Film Festival	Israel	2000
Havana Film Festival	Cuba	1999
Hispanic Film Festival	Iceland	2002
Hong Kong International Film Festival	Hong Kong	2000
Jakarta International Film Festival	Indonesia	2000
Karlovy Vary Film Festival	Czech Republic	1999
Moscow Film Festival	Russia	1999
Spanish Film Festival	Philippines	2002
Tokyo International Film Festival	Japan	2000
Toronto Film Festival	Canada	1999



## **TE DOY MIS OJOS (2003)**

**Director:** Icíar Bollaín

**Script:** Icíar Bollaín and Alicia Luna

**Producer:** Santiago García de Leániz and Enrique González Macho

**Director of Photography:** Carles Gusi

**Editing:** Ángel Hernández Zoido

**Music:** Alberto Iglesias

**Actors:** Laia Marull (Pilar), Luis Tosar (Antonio), Candela Peña (Ana), Rosa María Sardá (Aurora), Kiti Manver (Rosa), Sergi Calleja (Terapeuta), Elisabet Gelabert (Lola), Nicolás Fernández Luna (Juan), Dave Mooney (John), Chus Gutiérrez (Raquel), Elena Irureta (Carmen)

**Premiere:** 24th September 2003, San Sebastián Film Festival, Spain

**Release Date in Spain:** 8th October 2003

**Box Office Takings:** €5.021.082,70 (6th highest earner in 2003 and 9th in 2004)

**Spectators:** 1.063.305

**DVD:** Manga Films S.L. B-48285-2003 (Spanish version). Swipe Films/Drakes Avenue Pictures Ltd 2005 (English version).

<b>Competition/Film Festival and Year</b>	<b>Award Won</b>	<b>Recipient</b>
Cartagena Film Festival	Best Actor	Luis Tosar
Cinema Writers Circle Awards, Spain, 2004	Best Actor	Luis Tosar
	Best Actress	Laia Marull
	Best Director	Icíar Bollaín
	Best Film	<i>Te doy mis ojos</i>
	Best Original Score	Alberto Iglesias
	Best Original Screenplay	Icíar Bollaín & Alicia Luna
Créteil International Women's Film Festival, France, 2004	Audience Award: Best Film	<i>Te doy mis ojos</i>
	Grand Prix: Best Film	<i>Te doy mis ojos</i>
Fotogramas de Plata, Spain, 2004	Best Film	<i>Te doy mis ojos</i>
	Best Actor	Luis Tosar
	Best Actress	Laia Marull
Goyas, Madrid, Spain, 2004	Best Film	<i>Te doy mis ojos</i>
	Best Actor	Luis Tosar
	Best Actress	Laia Marull
	Best Supporting Actress	Candela Peña
	Best Director	Icíar Bollaín
	Best Original Screenplay	Icíar Bollaín & Alicia Luna
	Best Sound	Eva Valiño, Alfonso Pino & Pelayo Gutiérrez
Ondas Awards, Catalonia, 2003	Best Spanish Film	<i>Te doy mis ojos</i>
San Sebastián International Film Festival, Spain, 2003	CEC Award: Best Film	<i>Te doy mis ojos</i>
	Best Actor	Luis Tosar
	Best Actress	Laia Marull
Sant Jordi, Catalonia, Spain, 2004	Audience Award: Best Film	<i>Te doy mis ojos</i>
	Best Spanish Actress	Laia Marull
Seattle International Film Festival, USA, 2004	Best Actor	Luis Tosar
Spanish Actors Union	Best Female Protagonist	Laia Marull
	Best Male Protagonist	Luis Tosar
	Best Supporting Female	Candela Peña

***TE DOY MIS OJOS (cont.)***

<b>Film Festival Participation</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Year</b>
Cannes Film Market	France	2004
Cartagena Film Festival	Colombia	2005
Copenhagen International Film Festival	Denmark	2004
Créteil International Women's Film Festival	France	2004
European Film Festival	Poland	2004
European Film Week	Hungary	2004
Guadalajara Film Festival	Mexico	2004
Istanbul October Film Week	Turkey	2004
Milwaukee International Film Festival	USA	2005
San Sebastián International Film Festival	Spain	2003
Seattle International Film Festival	USA	2004
Stockholm International Film Festival	Sweden	2004
Sundance Film Festival	USA	2004
Thessaloniki International Film Festival	Greece	2007
Tokyo International Women's Film Festival	Japan	2008

## LIST OF FILMS AND TELEVISION PROGRAMMES MENTIONED AND/OR DISCUSSED IN THIS THESIS

If the films listed here are defined as at least 75% Spanish on the MCU database and the director is Spanish no nationality is stated.

*7 vidas* (Telecinco, 1999-2006)  
*A mi madre le gustan las mujeres* (Daniela Fejerman and Inés París, 2002)  
*Abre los ojos* (Alejandro Amenábar, 1997)  
*Adosados* (Mario Camus, 1995)  
*África* (Alfonso Ungría, 1996)  
*Airbag* (Juanma Bajo Ulloa, 1997)  
*Alas de mariposa* (Juanma Bajo Ulloa, 1991)  
*Alba de América* (Juan de Orduña, 1951)  
*alegre divorciado, El* (Pedro Lazaga, 1975)  
*Alegre ma non troppo* (Fernando Colomo, 1994)  
*All That Heaven Allows* (Douglas Sirk, 1955: USA)  
*Amor de hombre* (Yolanda García Serrano and Juan Luis Iborra, 1997)  
*amor perjudica seriamente la salud, El* (Manuel Gómez Pereira, 1996)  
*Amores que matan* (Iciar Bollain, 2000)  
*Ana y los lobos* (Carlos Saura, 1973)  
*ángel exterminador, El* (Luis Buñuel, 1962: Mexico)  
*Antes que anochezca* (Julian Schnabel, 2000: USA)  
*Apo tin akri tis polis/From The Edge Of The City* (Constantine Giannaris, 1998: Greek/  
Russian)  
*Aquí no hay quien viva* (Antena 3, 2003-2006)  
*Arderás conmigo* (Miguel Ángel Sánchez Sebastián, 2002)  
*Barrio* (Fernando León de Aranoa, 1998)  
*bola, El* (Acheró Mañas, 2000)  
*Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005: Canada/USA)  
*buena estrella, La* (Ricardo Franco, 1997)  
*buena vida, La* (David Trueba, 1996)  
*Bwana* (Imanol Uribe, 1996)  
*Calle Mayor* (Juan Antonio Bardem, 1956)  
*Camada negra* (Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, 1977)  
*Carlos contra el mundo* (Chiqui Carabante, 2002)  
*Carne trémula* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1997)  
*cartas de Alou, Las* (Montxo Armendáriz, 1990)  
*Cascabel* (Daniel Cebrián, 1999)  
*Una casa en las afuera* (Pedro Costa, 1995)  
*cielo abierto, El* (Miguel Albaladejo, 2001)  
*Colegas* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1982)  
*Como un relámpago* (Miguel Hermoso, 1996)  
*Cosas que dejé en La Habana* (Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, 1998)  
*Cría cuervos...* (Carlos Saura, 1976)

*criatura, La* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1977)  
*Cuando todo esté en orden* (César Martínez Herrada, 2002)  
*Cuando vuelvas a mi lado* (Gracia Querejeta, 1999)  
*Currito de la Cruz* (Luis Lucia, 1948)  
*Darkness* (Jaume Balagueró, 2002)  
*Del rosa... al amarillo* (Manuel Summers, 1963)  
*Demonios en el jardín* (Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, 1982)  
*De nens* (Joaquín Jordà, 2003)  
*desencanto, El* (Jaime Chávarri, 1976)  
*Días de boda* (Juan Pinzás, 2002)  
*diputado, El* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1978)  
*¿Dónde está?* (Juan Carlos Claver, 2004)  
*Dones* (Judith Colell, 2000)  
*En construcción* (José Luis Guerín, 2001)  
*En la ciudad* (Cesc Gay, 2003)  
*En la ciudad sin límites* (Antonio Hernández, 2002)  
*En la puta calle* (Enrique Gabriel, 1996)  
*Enough* (Michael Apted, 2002: USA)  
*Entre tinieblas* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1983)  
*Esa pareja feliz* (Juan Antonio Bardem and José Luis García Berlanga, 1953)  
*espíritu de la colmena, El* (Víctor Erice, 1973)  
*espíritu de una raza, El* (José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, 1951)  
*Una estación de paso* (Gracia Querejeta, 1992)  
*Experiencia prematrimonial* (Pedro Masó, 1972)  
*Éxtasis* (Mariano Barroso, 1996)  
*Extranjeras* (Helena Taberna, 2003)  
*familia, bien, gracias, La* (Pedro Masó, 1979)  
*familia y... uno más, La* (Fernando Palacios, 1965)  
*Friends* (NBC, 1994-2004: USA)  
*Frío sol de invierno* (Pablo Malo, 2004)  
*Fugitivas* (Miguel Hermoso, 2000)  
*Función de noche* (Josefina Molina, 1981)  
*Furtivos* (José Luis Borau, 1975)  
*Gary Cooper que estás en los cielos* (Pilar Miró, 1980)  
*golfos, Los* (Carlos Saura, 1961)  
*gran familia, La* (Fernando Palacios, 1962)  
*granja, La* (Antena 3, 2004-2005)  
*Ha llegado un ángel* (Luis Lucia, 1961)  
*¡Hay motivo!* (Álvaro del Amo, Vicente Aranda, Mariano Barroso, Bernardo Balzúnegui, Antonio José Betancor, Iciar Bollain, Juan Diego Botto, Daniel Cebrián, Isabel Coixet, Fernando Colomo, José Luis Cuerda, Ana Díez, Miguel Ángel Díez, El Gran Wyoming, Diego Galán, Víctor García León, José Luis García Sánchez, Yolanda García Serrano, Manuel Gómez Pereira, Chus Gutiérrez, Mireia Lluç, Víctor Manuel, Julio Medem, Sigfrid Monleón, Pedro Olea, Joaquín Oristrell, Pere Portabella, Gracia Querejeta, José Ángel Rebolledo, Manuel Rivas, David Trueba, Alfonso Ungría, Imanol Uribe and Pere Joan Ventura, 2004)

*Héctor* (Gracia Querejeta, 2004)  
*hijas de Mohamed, Las* (Silvia Munt, 2003)  
*Historias del Kronen* (Montxo Armendáriz, 1995)  
*Hola, ¿estás sola?* (Iciar Bollain, 1995)  
*Homicide* (David Mamet, 1991: USA)  
*hotel eléctrico, El* (Segundo de Chomón, 1905)  
*House of Games* (David Mamet, 1987: USA)  
*huída de los inocentes, La* (director, date and nationality unknown)  
*I am Sam* (Jessie Nelson, 2001: USA)  
*Illegal* (Ignacio Vilar, 2003)  
*Insomnio* (Chus Gutiérrez, 1997)  
*jardín de las delicias, El* (Carlos Saura, 1970)  
*Juego de la verdad* (Álvaro Fernández Armero, 2004)  
*Jungle Book, The* (Wolfgang Reitherman, 1967: USA)  
*Kramer vs. Kramer* (Robert Benton, 1979: USA)  
*Ladybird Ladybird* (Ken Loach, 1994: UK)  
*Lena* (Gonzalo Tapia, 2001)  
*Leo* (José Luis Borau, 2000)  
*León y Olvido* (Xavier Bermúdez, 2004)  
*ley del deseo, La* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1987)  
*Life with Billy* (Paul Donovan, 1994: Canada)  
*lunes al sol, Los* (Fernando León de Aranoa, 2002)  
*mala educación, La* (Pedro Almodóvar, 2004)  
*Mamá cumple cien años* (Carlos Saura, 1979)  
*Manolito Gafotas* (Miguel Albaladejo, 1999)  
*Mar adentro* (Alejandro Amenábar, 2004)  
*Marcelino pan y vino* (Ladislao Vajda, 1955)  
*Marie-Line* (Mehdi Charef, 2000: France)  
*Martín (Hache)* (Adolfo Aristarain, 1997: Spain/Argentina)  
*Más pena que gloria* (Víctor García León, 2001)  
*Más que amor, frenesí* (Alfonso Albacete, David Menkes and Miguel Bardem, 1996)  
*Me llamo Sara* (Dolores Payás, 1998)  
*Mi mujer es decente dentro de lo que cabe* (Antonio Drove, 1975)  
*Mi querida señorita* (Jaime de Armiñán, 1972)  
*Mi vida sin mí/My Life Without Me* (Isabel Coixet, 2003)  
*mitad del cielo, La* (Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, 1986)  
*Muerte de un ciclista* (Juan Antonio Bardem, 1955)  
*mujer del ministro, La* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1981)  
*Nadie hablará de nosotras cuando hayamos muerto* (Agustín Díaz Yanes, 1995)  
*Navajeros* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1980)  
*nido, El* (Jaime de Armiñán, 1980)  
*Nil by Mouth* (Gary Oldman, 1997: UK)  
*Nos miran* (Norberto López Amado, 2002)  
*novios búlgaros, Los* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 2003)  
*novios de mi mujer, Los* (Ramón Fernández, 1972)  
*Nueve cartas a Berta* (Basilio Martín Patino, 1967)

*Nunca pasa nada* (Juan Antonio Bardem, 1965)  
*Ocaña, retrat intermitent* (Ventura Pons, 1978)  
*Once Were Warriors* (Lee Tamahori, 1994: New Zealand)  
*Operación triunfo* (TVE 1, 2001-present)  
*otro barrio, El* (Salvador García Ruiz, 2000)  
*otro lado de la cama, El* (Emilio Martínez Lázaro, 2002)  
*otros, Los* (Alejandro Amenábar, 2001)  
*pájaro de la felicidad, El* (Pilar Miró, 1993)  
*palomo cojo, El* (Jaime de Armiñán, 1995)  
*Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingstone, 1990: USA)  
*Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chichas del montón* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1980)  
*Perdona bonita, pero Lucas me quería a mí* (Félix Sabroso and Dunia Ayaso, 1997)  
*pico, El* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1983)  
*pico 2, El* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1984)  
*pisito, El* (Marco Ferreri, 1958)  
*placeres ocultos, Los* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1976)  
*Plácido* (José Luis García Berlanga, 1961)  
*Platicando* (Marisa Lafuente, 2004)  
*Poison* (Todd Haynes, 1991: USA)  
*Una preciosa puesta de sol* (Álvaro del Amo, 2003)  
*prima Angélica, La* (Carlos Saura, 1974)  
*primera noche de mi vida, La* (Miguel Albaladejo, 1998)  
*Princesas* (Fernando León de Aranoa, 2005)  
*Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960: USA)  
*Puede ser divertido* (Azucena Rodríguez, 1996)  
*¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1985)  
*Un rayo de luz* (Luis Lucia, 1960)  
*Raza* (José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, 1941)  
*Rencor* (Miguel Albaladejo, 2002)  
*ruiseñor de las cumbres, El* (Antonio del Amo, 1958)  
*Saïd* (Llorenç Soler, 1999)  
*Salto al vacío* (Daniel Calparsoro, 1995)  
*Secretos del corazón* (Montxo Armendáriz, 1997)  
*Segunda piel* (Gerardo Vera, 1999)  
*Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998-2004: USA)  
*sin nombre, Los* (Jaume Balagueró, 1999)  
*Sleeping with the Enemy* (Joseph Ruben, 1991: USA)  
*Sleuth* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1972: UK)  
*Smoking Room* (Julio Wallowits and Roger Gual, 2002)  
*Sólo mía* (Javier Balaguer, 2001)  
*Soltera y madre en la vida* (Javier Aguirre, 1969)  
*Soltero y padre en la vida* (Javier Aguirre, 1972)  
*sudor de los ruiseñores, El* (Juan Manuel Cotelo, 1998)  
*Surcos* (José Antonio Nieves Conde, 1951)  
*Tacones lejanos* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1991)  
*Tata mía* (José Luis Borau, 1987)

*Taxi* (Carlos Saura, 1996)  
*Tesis* (Alejandro Amenábar, 1996)  
*teta i la lluna, La* (José Juan Bigas Luna, 1994)  
*Three Men and a Baby* (Leonard Nimoy, 1987: USA)  
*tía Tula, La* (Miguel Picazo, 1964)  
*Todo sobre mi madre* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1999)  
*traje, El* (Alberto Rodríguez, 2002)  
*tren de la memoria, El* (Marta Arribas and Ana Pérez, 2003)  
*Tristana* (Luis Buñuel, 1970: France/Italy/Spain)  
*Trois hommes et un couffin* (Coline Serreau, 1985: France)  
*Two Rode Together* (John Ford, 1961)  
*venganza, La* (Juan Antonio Bardem, 1959)  
*verdugo, El* (José Luis García Berlanga, 1964)  
*Vida conyugal sana* (Roberto Bodegas, 1974)  
*vida de nadie, La* (Eduard Cortés, 2002)  
*Visita de doña María Cristina y don Alfonso XIII a Barcelona* (Fructuós Gelabert I Badiella, 1898)  
*Vacas* (Julio Medem, 1992)  
*Vente a Alemania, Pepe* (Pedro Lazaga, 1971)  
*Volver* (Pedro Almodóvar, 2006)  
*The War Zone* (Tim Roth, 1999: Italy/UK)  
*Westward the Women* (William A. Wellman, 1951: USA)  
*Will and Grace* (NBC, 1998-2006: USA)  
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*Young Soul Rebels* (Isaac Julien, 1991: UK)

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References given alongside captions below refer back to the page in the thesis they were mentioned.

## COPYRIGHT PERMISSIONS

### *Familia*

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Special thanks to Elena Baranda of Video Mercury Films y Enrique Cerezo P.C for her help

### *Solas*

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Special thanks to Renata Cerdán, Coordinadora de Producción for her help.

### *Te doy mis ojos*

Pending from Producciones La Iguana

### *Cachorro*

Requested

### *Flores de otro mundo*

Pending from Producciones La Iguana

### *Poniente*

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## INTRODUCTION

6/2004

### ¿Cuántos somos en casa?

Entre 1991 y 2001, el número de hogares españoles ha aumentado un 20% frente a sólo un 5% de crecimiento poblacional

Según el Censo de 2001, existen **14.187.169** hogares en España, un **19,7%** más que en el año 1991. En la década 1991-2001 se han producido modificaciones importantes en la estructura y el tamaño de los mismos. El cambio más notable es el **aumento de hogares unipersonales** (de casi 1,6 millones a 2,9), pero también se ha notado una **disminución de las parejas con 4 hijos o más** (de 485 mil a 176 mil), el **aumento del número de parejas sin hijos** (de 2 millones a casi 2,5) y que los **hogares formados por una familia y alguna persona no emparentada se han multiplicado casi por cinco**.

Los jóvenes cada vez se emancipan más tarde, del total de jóvenes de 25 a 34 años (casi 7 millones), el **37,7%** todavía vive con sus padres (**43,5%** de los varones y **31,7%** de las mujeres). Los mayores de 65 años y sobre todo, en términos relativos, **los mayores de 85 años** han aumentado mucho en estos 10 años (**44,6%** estos últimos) y cada vez **tienen más tendencia a vivir solos**, sobre todo las mujeres, ya que en 1991 lo hacían unas **60.000** y en 2001 han pasado a ser unas **160.000**.

Estos y otros resultados que se presentan en este boletín se han obtenido de la última explotación de los **Censos de Población y Viviendas 2001**.



#### Definiciones básicas

Debe considerarse que a efectos censales se define **hogar** como un conjunto de personas (1 o varias) que residen habitualmente en la misma vivienda familiar y **familia** como grupo de personas (dos o más) que forman parte de un hogar y están vinculadas por lazos de parentesco, ya sean de sangre o políticos, independientemente de su grado.

**Núcleo familiar** es un concepto alternativo de familia, restringido a los vínculos de parentesco más estrechos: pareja sin hijos, pareja con hijos, madre con hijos, padre con hijos (los hijos deben ser solteros, no emparejados y no tener, a su vez, algún hijo con esas características porque, en caso contrario, podrían formar núcleo propio).

Más información en:

[www.ine.es](http://www.ine.es)



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Algunos indicadores		% variación 2001/1991
Número de hogares	14.187.169	19,7
Hogares unipersonales	2.876.572	81,9
Tamaño medio del hogar (persona)	2,9	-9,4
Jóvenes solteros entre 25 y 34 años que viven solos	346.290	208,7
Jóvenes entre 25 y 34 años que viven con sus padres	2.587.867	51,2
Parejas sin hijos	2.448.542	22,3
Parejas con 3 hijos o más	853.831	-41,7
Familias reconstituidas	232.863	-
Parejas de hecho	563.785	155,0
Personas de 65 años o más	6.796.936	26,6
Personas de 85 años o más que viven solas	199.362	160,0

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